The Effects of an Interrupted Formal Education of Central American Refugees in a U.S. Urban Secondary School: A Critical Phenomenological Cross-Case Analysis

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Abstract

The Office of Refugee Resettlement has reported increasing numbers of Central American student refugees entering the United States. Most student refugees crossing the U.S. southwestern border come from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Students with limited-interrupted formal education represent the neediest of English language learners due to their academic, mental, and social-emotional needs from past experiences with trauma, thereby representing a disenfranchised and vulnerable population.

This critical phenomenological multiple case study explored the experiences of 2 groups of students with limited-interrupted formal education in terms of academic achievement, those defined as successful and others who struggled. 2 cases were conducted, the first to understand why some Central American student refugees had experienced academic success and the second to understand why some Central American student refugees had struggled with academic achievement. The 2 cases were compared using cross-case analysis to gain knowledge from the successful students and see if this knowledge could be applied to the struggling students. The theoretical framework included critical and Latino race, community cultural wealth, and resiliency theories.

Findings showed the external support system of student participants had a significant influence on resiliency and academic achievement. Although data indicated the Newcomer Program had aided in some students' success, evidence indicated the need for ongoing and consistent mental health services. Results showed issues regarding identifying and providing special education services to Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal educations.

Keywords: student refugees, limited-interrupted education, English language learners, CRT, LatCrit, Community Cultural Wealth, Resiliency

Dedication

To my husband, Pablo, and our children, Nicholas, Mathilde, and Vivienne.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The Unaccompanied Alien Children Program is managed by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Administration for Children and Families, an operational division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS; McFarland, Cui, Rathbun, & Holmes, 2018). Homeland Security Act of 2002 defined an unaccompanied alien child as a child who (a) "has no lawful immigration status in the United States," (b) "has not yet attained 18 years of age," and (c) "with respect to whom there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody" (p. 1). Under the Homeland Security Act of 2002, U.S. Congress ruled the care and custody of unaccompanied minors should be transferred to the ORR from the former Immigration and Naturalization Service to move away from the adult detention mode (McFarland et al., 2018). The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 expanded and redefined DHHS's statutory responsibilities; through this act, U.S. Congress directed that each child must "be promptly placed in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interest of the child" (p. 1).

The Kids in Need of Defense (KIND, 2013), a non-profit organization that provides pro bono defense lawyers for unaccompanied minors stated the following:

> The United States serves as a leading destination for thousands of children who migrate every year without a parent or legal guardian. They are escaping severe abuse and violence, persecution, extreme deprivation, and other human rights abuses such as female genital mutilation or forced marriage; others have been abandoned, or trafficked, and some are seeking work, hoping to go to school, or are trying to reunify with family members, many of whom had left the children

> behind years before. The children's migration can also be, and very often is the result of a combination of these factors. (p. 5)

Unaccompanied minors who make it to the southern border of the United States have faced a lack of supportive measures and resources. Often, the needs of these youths have hindered the abilities of the legal and social services leaders to deal effectively with the youths (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). For its first nine years at the ORR, fewer than 8,000 children were served annually in the program. Since 2012, the number of unaccompanied minors entering the refugee program has jumped dramatically, with a total of 13,625 children referred to the ORR by the end of 2012. The program received 24,668 unaccompanied minor referrals in 2013; 57,496 referrals in 2014; 33,726 referrals in 2015; 59,170 in 2016; and 40,810 in 2017. In 2018, 49,100 cases were referred. In 2018, approximately 73% of all children referred were over 14 years of age, and over 71% were boys (DHHS, 2018). The numerical increases in minors with pointed needs in establishing stable living conditions were of particular relevance to this study.

The countries of origin of youth in the program were the following: Guatemala (54%), El Salvador (12%), Honduras (26%), and other (8%). Medina (2014) was a field psychologist who worked with Doctors Without Borders, an organization providing medical care and treatment to people across the globe. Medina (2014) stated the following:

> In some regions of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, gang rule is absolute, and young people are extremely vulnerable to forced recruitment into the gangs. Adolescents are continually intimidated and subjected to violence, pressurized into joining gangs or working for them as drug pushers or in other roles. A

> recurrent theme in out-migration is a large number of children who leave their countries, exposing them to the dangerous conditions of the journey. Some families prefer to see their sons and daughters exiled rather than risk them being killed or forced into a life of crime. (p. 74)

Medina (2014) pointed to the challenges of youth in transition, who might also have a linguistic and cultural difference, as considered in this study. The violence and poverty that many of these children have experienced in their native countries have led to limited and interrupted education opportunities (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium [WIDA] Consortium, 2015). Only about 60% to 70% of eligible students have attended primary and secondary school in each of these countries. Even when enrolled, attendance may be sporadic, and the quality varies depending on the length of the school day, the materials, the training of the teachers, and the facilities available for instruction (Lukes, 2014, 2015). The education provided for many students in Central America influences their abilities to adjust quickly to U.S. schools and be successful (Custodio & Loughlin, 2017). Students who enroll within English language learner programs outside their native culture require adjustments to show some measure of success, cultural awareness, and linguistic proficiency.

Students With Limited-Interrupted Formal Education

U.S. educators can best understand the academic needs of Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education once American teachers grasp the role of prior education for new arrivals. Understanding the backgrounds of these populations is integral in designing programs and supportive measures for these populations to not only thrive but to also incur a sense of pride and appreciation for their

own culture and foundation. In an extensive study of Latino immigrants, Lukes (2015) stated the following:

> Key to understanding the academic progress of immigrant students- the challenges they face and their success- is the research-based finding among students learning English as a second (or third or fourth) language, those with a more solid academic grounding in their home language have a much easier time both learning English and learning new academic context and skills. As a result, students with gaps in their education in the home language tend to struggle and make limited progress in learning English. (p. 64)

Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix (2000) studied immigrant teens who arrived in the United States with significant gaps in their schooling, and the researchers found these students have often been out of school for 3 to 4 years before arriving. For example, publicly supported schooling in Central America ends at the equivalent of the sixth grade. Often, adolescent students are only required to attend school part-time (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). As these students pursue education in the United States, the norms of the system require advancing to the high school level, acquiring a GED, or earning a high school diploma. The norms in other cultures may not call for this level of education, either due to competing areas of focus, access, or a difference in traditions.

Thomas and Collier (2002) affirmed evidence had shown students with first-language literacy had surpassed their peers in academic proficiency levels. August and Shanahan (2006) found that when students were literate in their native languages and had developed sufficient reading and writing skills, they could more easily apply that knowledge to the new language. Zacarian (2011) stated, “School leaders should

anticipate that students from non-literacy-oriented homes, with interrupted prior schooling experiences, or who are living in poverty will likely take much longer to become academically proficient than high achieving, literacy oriented, socioeconomically advantaged students" (p. 25). When adolescent refugees' schooling is severely interrupted, students miss many years of academic knowledge, cognitive development, and behavioral skills, including cultural expectations and academic content knowledge. (Custodio & Loughlin, 2017). Educators should remain mindful of cultural exposure and adjustments that students must navigate in the classroom and beyond.

The basic structure of secondary school today is similar to the structure of secondary school at the turn of the 20th century (Hess, 2010). Students with limited-interrupted formal education may not receive the support and instruction needed to succeed in school (Custodio & Loughlin, 2017). From an organizational theory perspective, schools resemble professional bureaucracies where teachers implement standard programs (Hess, 2010). Hehir (2012) warned students might not prosper in standard programs "because professionals have a finite repertoire within their standard program" (p. 217); hence, abandoning "the one-size-fits-all ethos that held sway in the industrial era" (Hess, 2010, p. 4) has not transpired in any significant way today. Many students with limited-interrupted formal education might not be able to adapt to U.S. standards for programs.

The obstacles faced by refugee and immigrant students, especially those with different educational experiences, are substantial. Immigrant students bring valuable resources, such as enthusiasm about attending school and determination to succeed; however, they are overrepresented in dropout numbers and underrepresented in college

enrollment percentages (Bartlett & García, 2011; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Students with limited-interrupted formal education, although somewhere between 10% and 20% of the student population, often represent the neediest of English learners because of their limited literacy, gaps in academic knowledge, and possible critical social and emotional needs (Custodio & Loughlin, 2017). Students within these subsets have been labeled based on the various challenges faced. In this regard, they have been rendered an "overlooked and underserved" subpopulation of English language learners; therefore, available research on limited-interrupted formal education has shown the need to identify specific characteristics of these learners to be addressed through instructions designed to meet their unique learning needs (see Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

Results have shown students with limited-interrupted formal education are not being adequately served by educational philosophies that promise all students equal access to education; additionally, such policies and laws often stifle these students rather than protect them, as is the initial intent (e.g., E. E. García, Jensen, Scribner, 2009; Reyes, 2011). DeCapua and Marshall (2010b) attested that although certain effective instructional and support practices have been identified, widespread school success for this population of students has yet to be achieved, as evidenced by their high dropout rates. Given the diversity within the student body, results from studies with students with limited-interrupted formal education have shown that generalizability of the findings may be a challenge; by extension, there is not a common approach when working with students with limited-interrupted formal education and English language learner populations. Although the voices of educators, researchers, politicians, and lawmakers

are heard concerning the best way to educate these students, students' voices are usually left out.

Many policies and issues have been raised by newcomer programs designed to meet the needs of students with limited-interrupted formal education. Significant potential inhibitors to student success were identified, such as family reunification and student experiences with trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder, the No Child Left Behind accountability measures, Special Education services, the difficulty of attaining high school graduation credits, and postsecondary options (see Short & Boyson, 2012). Frequently, the difficulty with newcomer programs is that these are organized at a district level, and teachers have little control. Many district leaders are unprepared to implement adequate newcomer programs due to a lack of resources or research-based understanding of the unique challenges and cross-sections that these populations navigate; for example, Zimmerman-Orozco (2015) advised U.S. school district leaders did not have the background or sufficient resources to meet the academic, cultural, and emotional needs of students with limited-interrupted formal education. Consequently, the needs of students with limited-interrupted formal education outweigh the resources in many districts. The available resources are insufficient, and neither districts nor teachers can provide enough help with the available resources, which perpetuates a cycle of difficulties amongst these students, further disenfranchising their roles in the educational process and alienating their experiences. The results may include elevated dropout rates, truancy, a feeling of isolation or other emotional struggles, and the like.

The present researcher utilized a critical phenomenological approach and a multiple case study research design to comprehend how to best serve students, to

embrace and hear their perspectives, and to learn how and why some students have been successful and to what extent this knowledge could be applied to students who had struggled with academic success. The researcher sought to go beyond exploring the programs, practices, and structures designed for students classified as students with limited-interrupted formal education; the researcher included students' voices in the conversation concerning their education. Interviews, observations, and secondary data were collected and analyzed for two case studies: successful and struggling Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education. After conducting a with-in case analysis for each case, the researcher completed a cross-case theme analysis to compare the two groups of students. The goal of this study was to explore students' perspectives to show a sometimes, invisible, and vulnerable population in the research.

The purpose of this research study was exploratory and explanatory. The researcher sought to give a voice to Central American refugees labeled as students with limited-interrupted formal education. This researcher documented students' experiences from their perspectives so that they might influence the planning of their education; thus, education professionals, school administrators, and policymakers might become aware of their perceptions, knowledge, and ways of learning. The researcher investigated the circumstances of the experiences that might have contributed to the success of some students in one select high school in the Northeastern United States, while including an understanding of the circumstances of the experiences that might have hindered the success of others. The researcher sought to explain how the circumstances of these experiences were related to the decisions of students to stay in school or leave school. This researcher aimed to contribute to the body of understanding of best practices in

working with students ensconced within a linguistically and culturally different space. This researcher aimed to provide some information about how these students had experienced schools so that their voices could be incorporated into further research and policy.

To improve the rate of success for Central American refugees labeled as students with limited-interrupted formal education, this research is significant to the field of education in the following three main areas: school programs, school policies, and student support services. Findings from this study may apply to school programs designed for students with limited-interrupted formal education and as a way to improve students' experiences in the local condition. The research findings may help the school where the study occurred to evaluate the school's effectiveness in preventing students with limited-interrupted formal education from dropping out of school and having repeated academic failures.

In its application, the study may assist school officials at the research site to appreciate how some policies have influenced students of this particular population and how these decisions may have influenced this specific group of students. The findings may allow the school or district leaders to evaluate policies enacted that govern the education of students with limited-interrupted formal education to ensure these policies work.

Teachers and administrators may benefit from hearing the stories of students with limited-interrupted formal education, including detailing successes and failures when determining appropriate supports and services to be offered. Consequently, this study will add to the body of literature concerning the education of students with limited-interrupted

formal education and can help schools in designing appropriate programs and support services for this specific group of students.

Research Questions

This qualitative multiple case study utilized a critical phenomenological approach to answer the following research questions:

1. Why do some Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education achieve academic success?
2. Why do some Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education struggle to see academic success?
3. What can be learned when comparing successful and struggling Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education in terms of their academic achievement?

Research Site

One urban secondary school (Pseudonym) had Grades 7 to 12, with a student population of about 1,800, and was located in a metropolitan city in the Northeastern United States; this school was the site for this research study. The site was selected for convenience as this researcher was a teacher at the school. Working for several years at the research site has allowed the researcher to form relationships and build trust with the student, teacher, and administrator participants.

At the time of this study, the newcomer program was a sheltered classroom; within distinct grade levels, students were grouped according to their levels of formal schooling and level of English proficiency. English as a second language teachers instructed students. The students were placed in bilingual core classes, such as

mathematics, science, and social studies. For elective classes, including art, music, and physical education, students were mainstreamed without language support. Upon entering the district, English language learners were placed in the newcomer program if determined they had academic deficiencies in math and in their native languages.

This critical phenomenological multiple-case study was framed in the critical and constructivist paradigms. The researcher used multiple sources of data to understand the views and conditions of the purposefully selected students with limited-interrupted formal education. These sources included interviews, field notes constructed from participants' observations, reflective journal entries, and applicable artifacts and secondary source data. The purposefully selected participants were grouped in one of two cases: students who have achieved academic success and those who have struggled with academic achievement. Students were asked to describe their experiences about their academic accomplishments and struggles. The participants included three students from Guatemala, four students from El Salvador, and five students from Honduras. The participants included seven females and five males. Their responses were thematically coded for analysis, and the two groups were compared to gain insights into the participants' perspectives.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

English language learners as students with limited-interrupted formal education are a unique subgroup of the student population; therefore, the following review of literature contains a focus on these individuals to address the issues and challenges faced by them in schools. Federal and state laws enacted to educate English language learners, specifically those categorically identified under students with limited-interrupted formal education, are summarized with an examination of some programs developed to meet the needs of these students in secondary schools. This literature review provides an understanding of the theories that influence this study, and how this researcher aims to fill the gap in the areas of English language learners and students with limited-interrupted formal education experiences.

English Language Learners

Students whose first language is not English but are learning English through immersive exposure and education are considered emergent bilinguals and *English language learners* in the United States. However, O. García, Kleifgen, and Falchi (2008) explained English language learners were emergent bilinguals; through acquiring English, these students become bilingual or fluent in their home languages, as well as in English. The term emergent bilingual is recognized as an integral part of the students' linguistic and cultural resources.

English language learners are by no means a homogenous or monolithic group; they vary widely in terms of education, socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic levels, as well as psychological backgrounds and experiences. Researchers have identified the following three main groups of emergent bilinguals at the secondary level: (a) "new

arrivals with adequate schooling," (b) "students with interrupted and/or limited formal education (including refugees)," and (c) "long-term English language learners" (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2007, p. 40).

Emergent bilinguals constitute the first group of English language learners who are new arrivals. This group of English language learners includes students who have attended school in their new country for five years or fewer, and who are literate in their native languages. In the beginning, this group may perform poorly in the new language; however, within a short period, they will acquire the academic language necessary for mainstream classes (Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2012). Much of the research conducted on secondary emergent bilinguals and the educational programs commonly implemented for these students has shown most programs are not designed for students with limited-interrupted formal education (Menken et al., 2012).

Academic success for emergent bilinguals within a new country depends on these individuals' previous exposures to literacy and formal education (DeCapua et al., 2007; Freeman & Freeman, 2002). However, English learners from countries with substantial literacy levels may not have participated fully within the educational systems of their home countries (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Moreover, culture may function as an impediment to those students' success. Students from high-context cultures, such as the Latino community that fosters a strong allegiance and appreciation for traditions and values of identity, may have difficulty in adapting to the new values promoted by American learning traditions, such as specialization and attention to detail.

Students With Limited-Interrupted Formal Education

Students with limited-interrupted formal education is a term used to describe a unique subgroup of the English language learner population who share several unifying characteristics (WIDA Consortium, 2013, 2015). Students with limited-interrupted formal education are usually new to the U.S. school system and have had interrupted or limited schooling opportunities in their native countries (WIDA Consortium, 2013, 2015). WIDA Consortium (2015) defined students who have these characteristics as the following:

> Refugees, migrant students, or any student who has experienced limited or interrupted access to school for a variety of reasons, such as poverty, isolated geographic locales, limited transportation options, societal expectations for school attendance, a need to enter the workforce and contribute to the family income, natural disasters, war, or civil strife. (p. 1)

Efforts have been made to distinguish among the different groups of English language learners. Various labels have been used, such *as students with interrupted formal education* (*SIFE*; New York Department of Education), students with *limited formal schooling* (Freeman & Freeman, 2002), *newcomers* (Short, 2002), and *unschooled migrant youth* (Morse, 1997). This researcher used the term students with limited-interrupted formal education because it was an adopted and recognized term. The term was also descriptive of the students' experiences in school, which might be categorized as inadequate according to the aforementioned characteristics.

Students with limited-interrupted formal education share specific characteristics, regardless of ethnicity, country of origin, or native language. These characteristics may

include a lack of English proficiency, limited or no formal education, and limited or no native language literacy (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a). Current research in the field of English language learners has developed awareness about the diversity within this population. Furthermore, new empirical research has shown disparities between emergent bilinguals and other students at the secondary level; therefore secondary emergent bilinguals in the United States are disproportionately represented in national rates of dropout, grade retention, and course failure (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009).

Issues and Challenges

This section addresses the issues and challenges that students with limited-interrupted formal education face, including individual and external challenges, inside and outside school. The circumstances behind students with limited-interrupted formal education fleeing their countries of origin can cause perpetual difficulties thriving within a new country. In addition, this section shows the psychosocial and academic factors involved within these issues involving the transition from one country and culture to a new environment, unfamiliar to students with limited-interrupted formal education.

Psychosocial factors. Research about English language learners and students with limited-interrupted formal education populations must recognize that most refugee students and Latino students who come as unaccompanied minors have experienced serious traumatic events. These factors may influence these students' abilities to cope with many changes in their lives. In some cases, traumatic experiences and particularly challenging situations may be so severe that counselors and other professionals may need to offer additional support. Often, a support team may be necessary to deal with the unique challenges that this group faces (Custodio & Loughlin, 2017).

Social disruption, impoverishment, and increased vulnerability are some psychosocial factors that affect adolescent refugees (Boyden, de Berry, Feeny, & Hart, 2002). Some may have experienced human trafficking and others have become separated from their families in the search for safety (Hos, 2016). Furthermore, Hos (2016) stated that due to refugee students experiencing stressors, such as from migration, acculturative stress, and learning a new language, student refugees could become vulnerable to mental health problems.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, family separation due to war and conflict may pose a challenge for refugee students with limited-interrupted formal education. The living conditions of refugees in the new country may make it challenging to begin the resettlement process because they often end up in areas high in poverty (Kataoka et al., 2003). Acculturative stress or the stress that surfaces when adjusting to a new cultural context can weigh heavily on student refugees (Birman, Trickett, & Buchanan, 2005). In addition, migration stress can result if one does not have the support of family and friends when settling in a new place (Birman et al., 2005).

The dramatic influence of migration involves the intersection of several challenging experiences, which include having feelings of isolation, experiencing challenges to one's ethnic identity, and facing changing family roles and dynamics. Teachers may find that students are restless, are forgetful, have poor concentration, are easily distracted, or are prone to daydreaming (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). Researchers should consider that some students, whose parents have been deported, may develop a strong sense of abandonment, while adjusting to living conditions with unfamiliar or previously unknown relatives.

Trauma can affect the physical and emotional health of a child. Studies have shown that trauma has been associated with poor control of emotions, inconsistent academic performance, discomfort with authority figures, using violence as a way to solve issues, and unpredictable and impulsive behaviors (Custodio & Loughlin, 2017). In addition to the imposed loss of one's country and separation from that country's culture and heritage, other traumatic events may accompany this trauma. Youth may have experienced the death or loss of loved ones, witnessed violent acts, faced life-threatening situations, lived within a chaotic or dangerous environment, and witnessed or been victimized by physical or sexual abuse.

Sutner (2002) reported that many adolescent refugees were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (2010) defined post-traumatic stress disorder as "a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults like rape" (para. 1). Sutner (2002) reported signs of post-traumatic stress disorder remained apparent in refugee children, even after 10 years in the United States; thus, refugee students with limited-interrupted formal education could still experience a host of psychological problems. These problems might include depression, sleep disorders, and emotional instability; such experiences could be long-lasting and persistent while children navigate the challenges of adapting to a new living environment surrounded by an unfamiliar culture.

One significant stressor for student refugees is their ability to learn a new language. Students with limited-interrupted formal education experience more difficulty

compared to their immigrant counterparts with prior formal education. Student immigrants versed in the ways and practices of schooling do better in schools compared to those who are not versed (Curry, 2001). For example, populations of Somali student refugees relocating to New Zealand and the Khmer in Australia with little formal education and no literacy in their native language had greater difficulties compared to their immigrant counterparts (Boua, 1990; Humpage, 1999).

Academic needs. According to Mace-Matluck, Alexander-Kasparik, and Queen (1998), "The situation for adolescent refugees is especially poignant, because they have experienced traumatic events that may affect their general cognitive, social, and even sometimes physical development" (p. 12). Chronic exposure to traumatic events may adversely affect attention, memory, and cognition; reduce a child's ability to focus, organize, and process information; interfere with effective problem solving and planning; and result in overwhelming feelings of frustration or anxiety. Evidence has shown trauma can affect a child's school performance and can result in a lower grade point average, higher truancy, increased dropout tendency, higher incidences of suspension and expulsion, and decreased reading comprehension.

When adolescent refugees' schooling is severely interrupted, they suffer a deficit in the exposure to academic knowledge. In addition to the cognitive development that occurs over many years at school, the language of schooling, ways of being and behaving in school, cultural expectations, and content knowledge are thwarted (Hos, 2016). In learning a second language, Cummins (1981) suggested two sets of skills would show a person's language proficiency: (a) basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and (b) cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS refer to the language skills

that learners need to engage effectively in face-to-face interaction and involves the mastery of contextualized language. By contrast, CALP refers to the linguistic knowledge and literacy abilities needed to engage effectively in academic coursework (Cummins, 1981). Although BICS may develop through exposure to language due to daily communication, the development of CALP is more complex. Collier (1987, 1989) found English language learners with low English skills might take 4 to 8 years to reach the average grade level proficiency of their English-speaking peers. Similarly, Cummins (1994) suggested English language learners might take at least five years to reach levels of academic English proficiency comparable to their English-speaking peers.

Researchers show many Latino parents cannot fully support their children at home, given their own limited English abilities. According to Rong and Preissle (2009), "Immigrant Central American children are more likely to have parents with fewer years of schooling and employment in menial jobs, to live in a linguistically isolated household, and to have English proficiency problems" (p. 245). Latino parents may have limited educational backgrounds themselves, may think their English skills are insufficient, or may work evenings and weekends. Often, these parents and supportive adults may not know what is necessary to prepare their youth for postsecondary options and may even be embarrassed to approach the child's school for help due to language and cultural barriers.

Federal and State Laws

Federal legislation, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, prohibit discrimination and require that public schools provide adequate programs for all students. Bilingual education programs were

established with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Additionally, amendments to the ESEA in 1984 and 1988 generated funding for English language learners with special needs and for alternative programs. In 1994, the ESEA was reauthorized; therefore, funding for immigrant education was allocated. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) required the inception of research-based programs for immigrant students that meet their needs academically and socially (Echevarria & Graves, 2003). The ESSA passed in 2015 and replaced its predecessor, the NCLB (2002); it reformed but did not eliminate provisions relating to the standardized tests given to students.

In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court announced a decision on a case overturning a Texas law where school districts would receive funds only for the education of children legally residing within the country. This decision, known as *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), found school district leaders must not consider a child's immigration status as a factor in enrollment (Eyles, 2018). The court stated that because "the illegal alien of today may well be the legal alien of tomorrow," (*Plyer v. Doe*, 1982, para. 3); without an education, these undocumented children, already at a disadvantage due to poverty, lack of English-speaking ability, and the undeniable racial prejudices, "will become permanently locked into the lowest socio-economic class" (*Plyer v. Doe*, 1982, para. 3). *Plyer v. Doe* (1982) determined the following:

> By denying these children a basic education, we deny them the ability to live within the structure of our civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation. (para. 3)

The NCLB (2002) did not mandate specific types of programs addressing measures of equity amongst students identified as English language learners or students with limited-interrupted formal education, thus allocating school district leaders the responsibility of choosing appropriate research-based programs for their student body (Lazarin, 2006). The legal charge aimed to promote English language learning in addition to an increase in the academic attainment of students through meaningful instruction. Furthermore, the fundamental principles underlying the NCLB (2002) focused on high standards of learning and instruction to increase academic achievement with a focus on reading and math among all identified subgroups in the K-12 population.

One of the subgroups identified within these parameters is that of the growing population of English language learners. Included in the legislation, all students identified as English language learners have a 3-year window to take assessments in their native languages; after this initial period, they must demonstrate proficiency on an English-language assessment, as considered commensurate with their same aged-peer groups. However, this standard included that the local educational authority may grant an exception to any individual English learner for another two years' testing in his or her native language on a case-by-case basis. Although these practices appear reasonable, the reality is that only 10 states choose to test any English language learners in their native languages (Crawford, 2007).

Connecticut's law (CGS § 10-17 a-n) requires that all English language learners receive instruction specifically designed with two overarching goals: (a) English language development and (b) academic content achievement. When a new student enrolls in a school district, it is the district's obligation to determine whether the student

is an English language learner and to place that student in an appropriate instructional program. The law requires “eligible English Language Learner students to receive up to 30 months of bilingual education if they are in a school with at least 20 students who speak the same non-English native language and need assistance learning English” (CGS § 10-17 a-n). Once the 30 months conclude, the district leader must provide language transition support services to the students if they do not meet the English language mastery standard. These services may include a variety of measures, such as English as a second language programs, sheltered English programs, English immersion programs, tutoring and homework assistance, or other programs taught in English.

With the newly authorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2015 (known as Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA) there may be some relief for students with limited-interrupted formal education, but the continued pressure to make years of progress in months will remain (Custodio & Loughlin, 2017). Leaders of programs and other support mechanisms targeting students with limited-interrupted formal education must consider that secondary students with limited-interrupted formal education navigate a variety of challenging intersections. These include the need to earn credits, pass required graduation tests in many states, and prepare for postsecondary options.

Integral to any educational and supportive programming is the recognition that immigrant adolescents are at risk due to their unstable legal statuses. They may experience fear and anxiety about being apprehended, being separated from their parents, and being deported. Furthermore, their legal status can impede access to postsecondary education (Suarez-Orozco & Qin, 2006).

President Obama issued an executive order, now known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA, 2014). This order allowed undocumented students to be free from deportation; it allowed them to obtain a work permit; additionally, in half of the states, undocumented students could attend college at in-state tuition rates. DACA (2014) allowed them to join the armed forces and in most states, obtain a driver's license. This executive order is not a path to citizenship, but it does provide a future for undocumented students, even if only in the short term. Since the implementation of DACA, the number of states who allow in-state tuition for undocumented students has risen from 9 to 24. Upon its implementation, DACA was a reaction to the frustration over the inability of U.S. Congress to pass a version of the DREAM Act, which has been discussed and debated for several years. The Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) would have allowed undocumented children to attend college, join the military, and gain legal employment. Despite numerous attempts to draft and pass this legislation, it did not gather enough support from legislators to pass.

Programs

The length and breadth of specific programs to address student's whose first language is not English vary in terms of the approaches and delivery of language instruction within the formal educational setting. These programs are delivered through a variety of means, which include traditional English as a second language, gratified-based English as a second language, transitional bilingual, maintenance bilingual, and two-way bilingual education (Linquanti, 1999). Regarding the delivery of pedagogy, there are English as a second language standards published by the Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages organization. The aim of this branch of instruction is to teach

students the interconnection of social scenarios, to use English in academic settings, and to use English in socially and culturally suitable ways (Short & Boyson, 2004, 2012). Most English as a second language programs are monolingual English programs, where educators instruct only in English. Students are to be pulled-out of their conventional classrooms for advanced instruction in English language. In contrast to this delivery method, some school leaders implement push-in English as a second language programs. Push-in programs require that the English as a second language instructor go into the mainstream classroom to support the English language learners from within the classroom.

Content-based English as a second language programming is usually founded on the concept that the acquisition of language is based on input evocative and comprehensible to the student (Krashen, 1982). These program leaders use curriculum material developed for academic classrooms. As an additional measure of language acquisition support, sheltered instruction is provided and focused on learning the academic content (Minaya-Rowe, 2008). With these learning measures, the content is presented to consider the student's proficiency so that there is a stronger likelihood of linguistic absorption. However, an important caveat and potential limitation of this educational method is that sheltered classrooms provide content instruction by certified teachers with the help of a certified English as a second language teacher. To increase the efficacy, experts have highlighted the content of classroom instruction should follow grade level coursework, which has been modified to meet the needs of the English language learners in the classroom.

Transitional bilingual education program leaders provide instruction in the students' native languages (Minaya-Rowe, 2008). These programs have been critiqued as remedial programs for lower track students; however, the goal for transitional bilingual programs has been English development, as well as bilingualism (Minaya-Rowe, 2008). Instruction in transitional bilingual programs begins with the students' native language, while gradually increasing English instruction so that English language learners can transition into mainstream classes. Moreover, maintenance bilingual program leaders strive to sustain the students' native language and add to the students' linguistic abilities as they learn a second language (Baker, 1996). With this delivery of instruction, the goal is to develop both languages while preserving the culture of the minority group. In maintenance bilingual programs, students use their languages at least half or more of the time (Baker, 1996). This process creates an important incorporation of scaffolding tactics and builds upon a familiar linguistic exposure for the English language learner, thereby incorporating both familiar and newly introduced linguistic parameters to strengthen proficiency and connection with both communication styles.

In two-way bilingual programs, both innate English speakers and English language learners receive instruction in the same classroom. This sort of instruction can be seen as one that is least restrictive and lends best to the model of immersion for students seeking to strengthen their understandings of a language that is not in their primary dialect. Instruction is given equally in two languages so that both groups benefit from learning the languages (Baker, 1996). All groups are provided meaningful, challenging, and accelerated instruction, and students who are fluent in both languages

can embrace the value of linguistic nuances of their peers, thereby increasing connections within a multicultural environment.

Secondary student refugees labeled as students with limited-interrupted formal education cannot receive an appropriate education through the programs described above. To meet the needs of this unique group of students, *newcomer programs* are developed for students who have arrived in the United States with a limited-interrupted formal education. In newcomer programs, particular attention is afforded to the adjustment of youth to the culture and educational environment where students are enrolled. Students are introduced to the structure of the school, provided with English and gratified guidelines, and are familiarized with the culture of the United States. The objective of this particular educational pathway is to assist the transitioning language learner in his or her adaption to the system and the culture of the institution through the provision of guidelines in gratified subject areas.

The theory behind this methodology has at its core the goal to infuse language learners with the skill-set that allows them to learn together with their peers in the curricula to be mainstreamed together. The Center for Applied Linguistics (n.d.) has identified 115 secondary level newcomer programs; most are located in California, New York, and Texas (see Short & Boyson, 2004). Many of these programs followed one of the following three models: (a) within-school programs, (b) within-school courses, and (c) whole school programs; all have respective characteristics, strengths, and challenges in the acquisition of language learning skills.

Within-school programs are comprehensive English as a second language programs, where students are grouped in classes depending on their English proficiency

levels and levels of native language literacy. Depending on students' academic levels and English proficiency levels, additional language support accompanied by mainstream courses may be provided. Additional course may include science, social studies, and mathematics. When available, Spanish-speaking students with limited-interrupted formal education may be offered native Spanish courses. Because of the availability of staff and ample resources available, including Spanish textbooks at grade level, these students are taught with grade level content in their native languages. They receive credit for the courses that they take, a further incentive in maintaining their own cultural exposure.

Within-school courses are common in schools with few immigrants and refugee students; however, this type of program is usually available at schools that do not have many English language learners. (Short & Boyson, 2004, 2012). English language learners who attend schools with these programs may have had strong academic preparation in their native languages. These students can easily transfer their first language knowledge into acquiring the second language. Once they reach a sufficient score on an exit test of English, they are mainstreamed into regular classes.

Whole school newcomer programs are uncommon in the United States. One program, The International School in New York City, is one of the few educational institutions following this type of newcomer model. The International School has 450 students from a range of countries (Walqui, 2000). This school was designed as an alternative high school where students are encouraged to use their native dialects during class activities and projects. However, this program assumes that each student knows a written form of language and is literate in their native tongue; it may not work well for

students with limited-interrupted formal education who may not be literate in their native languages.

Theoretical Framework

A theory is a well-accepted principle that a researcher can use to explain a phenomenon. Several theories were important for this research because these formed the conceptual basis for understanding and analyzing the phenomenon under study. The theoretical framework connects the researcher to the existing knowledge, serves as a guide in the selection of research methods, and "helps to uplift the pragmatic involvements in addressing the important task of providing insights and consideration" (Nilsen, 2015, p. 119).

A bricolage approach, which is a web of different theories, can be used to study complex social issues (Kincheloe, 2005). To interpret the data in this study, this researcher used a theoretical bricolage of combined aspects of critical race, Latino critical race (LatCrit), community cultural wealth, and resilience theories. Collectively, this bricolage allowed this researcher to capture the stories of Central American student refugees who had been labeled as students with limited-interrupted formal education and to understand the circumstances of the experiences that would lead this specific group of students to achieve academic success or failure. This researcher's decision to use a bricolage approach to study a complex social issue centered on the historical and political context of the U.S. education of language minority students. The current political climate in the United States as well as the history of minority students still favors deculturization and holding them accountable to standards that make them look deficient.

According to Bohman (2010),

> Critical theories have emerged in connection with the many social movements that identify varied dimensions of the domination of human beings in modern societies. In both the broad and the narrow senses, however, a critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms. (p. 1)

Critical theorists seek to change the social structure that remains controlled by the values, knowledge, and needs of White people. The history of the education of language minority as well as the political context associated with these students has led this researcher to comprise the theoretical framework with critical race theory and LatCrit.

Critical race theory/Latino critical race theory (LatCrit). Upon arriving to the United States, Central American student refugees may experience negative social and political judgments connected to assumptions surrounding their race and language. Critical race theorists challenge dominant liberal ideas, such as colorblindness and meritocracy, and can show how these ideas operate to disadvantage people of color (Bernal, 2002). Flores (2000) stated, "The task for critical race scholars is to uncover and explore the various ways in which racial thinking operates" (p. 437) to move toward a more just society. LatCrit theorists add an important dimension to a critical race analysis; for example, issues include language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, and identity, and the theory addresses the intersectionality of racism, classism, and other forms of oppression. LatCrit is neither incompatible nor competitive with critical race theory; instead, "LatCrit is supplementary, complementary, to critical race theory. At its best, should operate as a close cousin- related in real and lasting ways, but not living under the same roof" (Valdés, 1996, pp. 26-27).

Critical race theory and LatCrit in education can be defined "as a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (Bernal, 2002, p. 105). CRT and LatCrit are transdisciplinary and draw on many bodies of progressive literature to understand and improve the education experiences of students of color (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenes, 1999). Table 1 defines the five tenets of CRT, explains the place of CRT in education research, and identifies the connection CRT has to this specific research.

Table 1

Connections of Critical Race Theory to This Research

Tenets of Critical Race Theory (Solorzano, 1998)	Using Critical Race Theory in Educational Research (Bernal, 2002)	Connections to This Research
1. The importance of transdisciplinary approaches: Critical race theory (CRT) insists that the analysis of race and racism must be viewed by placing them in both historical and contemporary contexts.	Using multiple lenses to better understand and improve the education of people of color (p. 110).	A theoretical bricolage was used in an attempt to better represent all students in this study.
2. An emphasis on experiential knowledge: CRT acknowledges that the experiential knowledge of people of color is important and critical to learning about racial subordination and encourages people to share their experience through storytelling, family histories, narratives, and so on.	As opposed to viewing the knowledge and experiences of people of color as a deficit, these are viewed as a strength.	Student participants shared their histories and experiences as limited/interrupted education students.
3. A challenge to dominant ideologies: CRT challenges that educational institutions claiming to support the philosophical underpinnings of U.S. society (everyone is equal, schools are colorblind, all are welcome) are actually serving to maintain the power structure of the dominant group.	Recognizes ways of knowing and "pedagogies of the home" (p. 110) that fall outside of the epistemologies that are typically honored by the school.	The research shed light on the policies and practices that may be disenfranchising students.
4. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination: Race and racism are endemic. CRT acknowledges the layers of racialized subordination based on gender, class, immigration status, sexuality, and so on exist.	Ways of knowing of people of color are informed by "histories that are based on the intersection of racism, sexism, classism and other forms of subordination" (p. 110).	The context in which learning takes place as well as the culture of the educational environment were analyzed to put students' experiences in perspective.

(continued)

Tenets of Critical Race Theory (Solorzano, 1998)	Using Critical Race Theory in Educational Research (Bernal, 2002)	Connections to This Research
5. A commitment to social justice: CRT is committed to social justice. Researchers acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower.	The ways of knowing of people of color are grounded in "raced and gendered histories" (p. 110). Research that investigates the experiences of people of color seeks both societal and political change.	This research sought to incorporate the voices of limited/interrupted formal education students into reformed school policies, programs, and student support services.

Critical qualitative researchers focus on societal critique to raise consciousness and empower people to bring about change. Students with limited-interrupted formal education represented a marginalized group in this study; hence, a critical research perspective was necessary. Critical research "goes beyond uncovering the interpretation of people's understandings of their world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 9). In this study, a critical approach allowed the researcher to focus on the context rather than on just individual experiences, as well as produce insights that lead to understanding the influence of context and power on individual people. Critical educational researchers question the context where learning occurs, the structural and historical conditions framing practice, and the culture that shapes educational practice (Merriam, 2009).

Community cultural wealth. Stewart (2015) stated the following:

> Refugee students often come from backgrounds and worldviews that are vastly different from their teachers', making it difficult, if not nearly impossible, for secondary teachers to single-handedly learn about all of their students' past and

present experiences, cultures, and languages or how to best nurture their learning. (p. 150)

Instead of focusing solely on the challenges that students with limited-interrupted formal education bring, teachers should frame their work with students with limited-interrupted formal education around students' many strengths. Some strengths that students with limited-interrupted formal education tend to bring to their education include "resiliency, problem solving, cultural pride, strong family ties, motivation, and sense of community" (Support ED Website). In addition, students with limited-interrupted formal education "funds of knowledge," or "the skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 20) can be a helpful place to begin.

Community cultural wealth theorist acknowledges the strengths that minority students bring into a classroom; to rebuke the assumption that people of color lacked the social and cultural capital required for social mobility, Yosso (2005) offered her theory of community cultural wealth. Yosso (2005) defined this theory as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contracts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). Yosso (2005) identified the following six sources of capital utilized by communities of color:

1. *Aspirational capital* is the resiliency of people of color to maintain hope, pursue dreams, and have high expectations for themselves and their children, even in the face of both real and perceived barriers.
2. *Linguistic capital* is the benefits of the social and cognitive skills attained from communicating in more than one language and/or in more than one style.

For children in school they may have the added benefit of having "been engaged participants in a storytelling tradition, which may include listening to and recounting oral histories, parables, stories, and proverbs. This repertoire of storytelling skills may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme" (p. 79).

3. *Familial capital* is the knowledge of a specific culture, looked after by families, and keeping a sense of "community, history, memory, and cultural intuition" (p. 79).
4. *Social capital* is the "networks of people and community resources" (p. 79).
5. *Navigational capital* is the ability to successfully navigate through institutions not designed with People of Color in mind.
6. *Resistant capital* is the "knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80).

Resilience. Rutter (2013) defined resiliency as "some individuals have a relatively good outcome despite having experienced serious stresses or adversities – their outcome being better than that of other individuals who suffered the same experiences" (p. 20). Garmezy (1991) defined resilience as "not necessarily impervious to stress. Rather, resilience is designed to reflect the capacity for recovery and maintained adaptive behavior that may follow initial retreat or incapacity upon initiating a stressful event" (p. 20). Furthermore, Garmezy (1991) concluded resiliency was linked to a number of protective factors: "Government, by providing protective factors, enables some who would otherwise be lost to a fruitful life to move above the threshold of competence

needed to survive in an increasingly complex, technological society" (p. 416). This proclamation indicated the environment around the child might contribute significantly to the outcomes of children experiencing stress.

Garmezy's (1991) ecological view of resilience was based on protective factors at the individual level, familial levels, and external to the family, which all influence resilience. These influences include the following:

1. *Individual factors* refer to dispositional attributes of the child such as temperament (activity level), how one meets new situations (positive responsiveness to others), and cognitive skills.
2. *Familial factors* refer to family cohesion and warmth (despite poverty or marital discord), the presence of a caring adult in the absence of responsive parents (such as a grandparent), or a concern by parents for the wellbeing of their children.
3. *Support factors* refer to external to family and includes the availability and use of external support systems by parents and children, a strong maternal substitute, a supportive and concerned teacher, or an institutional structure that fosters ties to the larger community (e.g., church or social worker).

In his discussion of protective factors and their impact on resiliency, Rutter (2013) described key mental features and operations, such as planning, self-control, self-reflection, sense of agency, and self-confidence. Rutter suggested that individuals who possessed these mental features had both control and success at changing events. Consequently, he proposes that it may be the individual's mental features that alter how they deal with adversity, rather than any possible protective environmental effects.

Individuals that maintain a positive mindset or cope positively may mediate the effect of stressors, and therefore, lead to outcomes that are more positive.

Rutter (2013) emphasized another protective factor as the importance of social relationships. Protective factors, such as maternal warmth, sibling warmth, and a positive atmosphere in the family, can be defensive against emotional and behavioral disturbances. Rutter highlighted the importance of *turning point experiences*. Rutter (2013) defined these experiences as moments in an individual's life where there is a "discontinuity with the past that removes disadvantageous past options and provides new options for constructive change" (p. 20). At turning points, individuals can show resilience despite having nonresilient outcomes throughout their pasts. Rutter (2013) suggested professionals should consider how to introduce turning points through mentoring or the development of new relationships. Moreover, there is no indication that that any protective factor is of greater value over another. There are protective factors that correlate positively with resilient outcomes.

Summary

Students with limited-interrupted formal education bring valuable resources, such as enthusiasm about attending school and determination to succeed; however, they are overrepresented in dropout numbers and underrepresented in college enrollment percentages (Bartlett & García, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). The obstacles faced by this immigrant group of students are substantial; however, the policies and laws implemented to help these students further disenfranchise them. Therefore, the context in which learning occurs as well as the culture of the educational environment were analyzed to understand students' experiences.

Critical race theory and LatCrit served as the overarching lens to evaluate the policies and powers structures that affect students with limited-interrupted formal education. Additionally, this researcher used community cultural wealth and resiliency theories to explain the similarities, differences, and patterns of two groups of student participants: those achieving and struggling with academic achievement. This combination of theories provided for a deeper understanding of students' histories and experiences as limited-interrupted education students in secondary schools.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter introduces the critical phenomenological multiple case study format framing the topic of the experiences of students with limited-interrupted formal education. This research approach allowed for a deep understanding of the circumstances that would lead to academic success and failure for refugee students from Central America. The researcher used a phenomenological approach and case study methodology to answer the following research questions:

1. Why do some Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education achieve academic success?
2. Why do some Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education struggle to see academic success?
3. What can be learned when comparing successful and struggling Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education in terms of their academic achievement?

Intervention

The newcomer program in this study was implemented to address the needs of student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education. The goal of the program was to meet the needs of recently arrived, high school English language learners who had gaps in their education and needed intensive academic instruction to prepare them for high school courses. The program began in January 2015 in response to the unprecedented number of unaccompanied minors entering the United States as refugees. Foundation courses in English as a second language, math, and science were designed to prepare students for regular course sequence. In addition to academic supports, leaders of

the program sought to provide students with counseling and social work services. Furthermore, the program included an English language learner tutoring center in the school to provide students with extra help.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher's motivation to conduct the study was influenced by experience as a refugee to the United States, as a former English language learner student, and as a Spanish teacher working for several years with limited-interrupted formal education students. Although the researcher immigrated to the United States at a young age, she can remember vividly the difficulty associated with adapting to a new culture and learning a new language. This researcher can recall the feeling of being different, of being "the other," and being someone seen within a space of marginality. Like the participants in the study, this researcher had to face the complicated process of forming a new identity and navigating a new school system. This adjustment was difficult with a cultural and geographical change at a young age. Despite challenges, the researcher became the first in her family to finish high school and graduate from college. Navigating the American school system was a difficult task that the researcher had to face and empathizing with the participants in this study was something that came easily.

This researcher has witnessed the struggles that Central American student refugees have encountered over the past few years and observing motivated students working hard to succeed but not being successful, and ultimately making the decision to drop out of school. The stories presented in this study should provide insights into the Central American student refugee experiences. The findings from this study also provide

school practitioners and researchers with ways to improve the educational opportunities for limited-interrupted formal education students.

Creswell (2014) described qualitative research as “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). A qualitative study is appropriate when the researcher aims to explain a phenomenon by relying on the perception of a person's experience in a given situation (Stake, 2010). The purpose of this study was to give a voice to the participants about their limited-interrupted formal education as refugees, including successes or failures due to policies that affect power structures and supports.

The phenomenological approach applies when a researcher intends to understand the phenomena in the participants’ terms, to describe the human experience as the person experiences it, and to allow the essence to emerge (Willen, 2007). The aim of interpretive phenomenology is dialogue designed to understand the world of the participants. Through engaged participation, observations, and dwelling in the participants’ world, the researcher can show the lived experiences of the participants (Given, 2008). Van Manen (1990) affirmed the essence of the phenomenon would be revealed through a “systematic attempt to uncover and describe the internal meaning structures of lived experience” (p. 10). The teacher-researcher sought to understand and describe in this study the contextual factors of student’s experiences, such as policies and protocol that impacted these students, at the school and district levels. The teacher-researcher came in close contact with participants through classroom observations as a teacher. The teacher-researcher could examine how student participants understood and experienced limited-interrupted formal education in their world.

This researcher also relied upon case study methodology. Case study research is anchored in real-life situations, resulting in a rich and holistic account of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009). Researchers can use this type of methodology to examine educational processes, problems, and programs to develop an understanding that can, in turn, affect and potentially improve practice. Yin (1994) stated, "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). As a comprehensive research strategy, case study comprises an all-encompassing method with the logic of design incorporating specific approaches to data collection and data analysis (Yin, 1994).

The case studies in this research are particularistic (focused on a particular phenomenon), descriptive (the product was a rich, thick description of the phenomenon), and heuristic (illuminated the reader's understanding of the phenomenon; Merriam, 2009). Critical case studies comparing academically successful and struggling limited-interrupted formal education students allow for developing and comparing conceptual categories with the intent of analyzing and interpreting the phenomenon. Each case was examined independently, and then a cross-case analysis was performed. As the participants shared their stories and experiences as limited-interrupted education students, they provided insights into their world both successful and struggling with academic achievement. Miles and Huberman (1984) defined cross-case analysis as searching for patterns, similarities, and differences across cases. In multiple case study research, the goal is to compare and contrast the selected cases (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Role of the Researcher

Critical research paradigms can promote equality and social justice. Critical transformative research employs specific methodologies that aim to promote the inclusion of the disenfranchised. Designed to enhance the well-being of students with limited-interrupted education, the teacher-researcher aimed to expose inequalities within the educational context. The participants acted as collaborators in the construction of knowledge in this study to bring awareness and change to the policies that influence them at the school and district levels. Therefore, the collaboration between the researcher and participants allowed for the co-construction of knowledge and the sharing of beliefs. Insights and understandings derived from the data were used to promote awareness (Christ, 2013).

A researcher's epistemology is their theory of knowledge and serves to decide how social phenomena will be studied (Creswell, 2014). Constructivists believe the knower and known are inseparable, see inquiry as value bound, and view reality as being constructed (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The role of the teacher-researcher in this study was to explore, expose, reason, question, and reflect on the topic of limited-interrupted formal education with the participants to create new understandings. The underlying assumptions guiding this study were that oppression existed in the world, and inequalities and power structures disenfranchised vulnerable populations. The goal of critical research should be to work toward increasing social justice. The researcher-teacher sought to understand the experiences of successful and struggling students with limited-interrupted formal education. The underlying assumption guiding the constructivist paradigm is an

attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from those who live it (Schwandt, 2000).

The constructivist paradigm emphasizes that research is a product of the values of the researcher and participants, and results cannot be independent of them. The critical researcher engages "in interpreting, explaining, illuminating, and theory building" (Christ, 2013, p. 191). Trede, Higgs, and Rothwell (2008) described the critical approach as one of reflection and a departure from the status quo (p. 4). At the center of critical dialogues, liberation was found, free from unnecessary and unreflected constraints, including those incurred by knowledge limitations. A critical perspective "intentionally attempts to shed more light on the ontological and epistemological stance that guides the researcher's knowledge generation" (Trede et al., 2008, p. 4). This researcher sought to uncover the policies and protocols that influenced students with limited-interrupted formal education, specifically in the form of scheduling, special education services, the dissemination of information, and graduation requirements. Administrator and teacher participants' shed light on the practices and policies that may disenfranchise students with limited-interrupted education.

The researcher-teacher assumed a critical constructivist worldview (see Christ, 2013) when interviewing participants to learn about their perceptions and experiences as student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education. The researcher assumed an emic role in the construction of knowledge while assisting the participants in providing their voices about being a disenfranchised group of students; hence, the researcher aimed to create awareness and develop well-being to the participants through reformed school policies, programs, and support services.

Greene (2007) expanded the notion of a paradigm a step further. In her attempt to synchronize opposing views of paradigms, Greene suggested important anchors for inquiry findings, while embodying open, dynamic, and inviting dialogue which she calls a mental model. Although the mental model included underlying philosophical assumptions such as ontology, epistemology, and methodology, it adds to the definition values, beliefs, past experiences, and practical wisdom. The positionality of the researcher refers to the cumulative effect of the researcher's viewpoints, emotions, previous knowledge, beliefs, and other subjective processes of the human psyche in the background during a study effort (McGarry, 2015).

Table 2

The Worldview Matrix

Researchers' worldview	Constructivist paradigm	Critical/transformative paradigm
Ontology (reality/what exists is that which can be represented): What is the nature of reality in this critical phenomenological multiple-case study?	Emic—co construction of meaning. Each person's reality is different. No absolute truths.	Inequalities exist. Exposing power structures and bring voice of the oppressed to light can lead to social change.
Epistemology (theory of knowledge construction): What is knowledge?	Co construction of knowledge about events occur as a result of closeness. Researcher and participants work together to create knowledge.	Exposing inequalities and representing the voice of the oppressed to the masses broadens social awareness. Participants are collaborators.
Axiology (values in research): What is the role of values in influencing the way research is conducted?	Researcher and participants recognize bias and negotiate their shared interpretations and views about the value the research process.	Oppression exists in the world and the role of research should be to work toward increasing social justice.
Methodology: How are the processes of research used?	Inductive approach: Researcher uses constructivist grounded data analysis approaches to building patterns, themes, and general concepts.	Participatory and action-oriented research is designed to enhance individual, social, and societal well-being.

Sampling

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) defined sampling as the process of selecting a subset or sample unit from a larger group or population of interest. A sampling design consists of the framework that encompasses the sampling scheme and sample size (Collins, 2010). Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Researchers have used purposeful sampling widely in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2015). This process involves

one identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a purposeful sampling strategy, the researcher used critical case sampling to select a small number of important cases to "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (Patton, 2015, p. 276). The researcher used the snowball sampling approach to locate information-rich key informants (see Patton, 2014).

The teacher-researcher began the study by interviewing the English language learner district administrator and teachers working in the newcomer program at the research site. They were informed of the study and the criteria for selecting students to participate in one of the two cases: students achieving academic success and students experiencing academic hardship. *Successful* was defined as students making educational gains, having graduated from the newcomer program, and exhibiting no behavior problems at the school. *Struggling* was defined as students making little educational gains, having attendance problems, exhibiting behavior issues, and being close to dropping out of school.

Participants

The researcher used purposeful selection criteria and critical sampling techniques to gain access to volunteers. Participants were sorted in one of two cases: student refugees from Central America with limited-interrupted formal education achieving success and those struggling with academic achievement. Participant inclusion criteria required having recently arrived in the United States, enrolled in the newcomer program at the research site, and identified as successful or struggling. Seven students participated

in Case 1 and five in Case 2. The participants included three students from Guatemala, four students from El Salvador, and five students from Honduras. The participants included seven females and five males.

The University of Bridgeport and the Institutional Review Board approved the consent process and protocol (see Appendix A). The researcher contacted individuals through email, in person, or by phone. Before administration of the interviews, each participant was given a consent form which explained all aspects of the study and opt-out criteria. The researcher interviewed two administrators, two English Learner teachers, one social worker, and 12 student participants for this study.

Procedures

The researcher created student interview questions (see Appendix B), teacher interview questions (see Appendix C), administrator interview questions (see Appendix D), an observation protocol (see Appendix E), a field note information form (see Appendix F), and a student information form (see Appendix G). Informed consent (see Appendices H and I) was required for each participant. The methodological map (see Appendix J) shows a graphic depiction of the procedures followed. The researcher recorded interviews electronically with a digital voice recorder. The interviews, classroom observations, and secondary source of data were collected between January and June 2019.

Interviews. Student questions focused on their experiences in the English language learner program, their overall experiences in the American education system, and their past education. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes depending on the correspondence of the student and their levels of responsiveness. The interviews were

conducted at the convenience of the participants to fit the schedule at the school. The teacher, administrator, and social worker interviews were used to support the information provided by the students.

Classroom observations. The researcher recorded observations of what the students were required to know, how the students were required to make sense of the information, and how they accomplished learning tasks. The researcher took fieldnotes on a computer and filled out the observation protocol for each observation completed. The goal of the observations was to add supporting evidence to the experiences of successful and struggling students.

Secondary source data. Documentation for the learning process, such as curriculum documents, the newcomer program course offerings, students' schedules, and student work, was collected. As student participants described how they had achieved success and their reasons for academic hindrance, secondary source materials were used to support the information that the students provided. Specific data from those listed above, provided the researcher-teacher with supporting evidence to answer the research questions. These items were analyzed to determine how well the system was equipped to accommodate the learners and how this element influenced their academic merits.

Federal and State Newcomer Policies

Federal and state policies acknowledge the importance of newcomer integration into American culture, society, and schools. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) defined newcomers and their families as having four basic needs: "a welcoming environment," "high quality academic environment designed to meet the language and development needs of newcomer students," "social emotional supports and skills

development to be successful in school and beyond," and "encouragement and support to engage in the education progress" (p. 7). The State Board of Education (2010) affirmed the acceptance of newcomer students within the school community and fostering a climate that promotes social and emotional well-being to enhance the school experience and student learning.

To ensure that newcomer students receive appropriate academic supports, it is necessary to assess students' educational needs, including language assistance services and whether the student requires an evaluation to determine if he or she has a disability and requires Special Education services under the Individuals With Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504; USDE, 2016). Students with limited-interrupted formal education should receive a separate literacy course that addresses students' literacy gaps (USDE, 2016).

State policy cautions against the over and under-identification of students for special education services, stating "We cannot assume that because an English language learner is having academic difficulties, the English language learner has a disability" (CT Data Bulletin, 2015, p. 6). The State Department of Education (2015) indicated, "The practice of waiting a number of years before referring a student for Special Education services is detrimental to English language learners who may truly have disabilities" (p. 6). Therefore, state policies recommend that when considering a referral of an English learner for special education, educators must remain cognizant of the formal educational history and recognize that academic language acquisition may take 4 to 7 years. English learners may experience memory and attention problems as they try to assimilate, and a "silent period" which is normal as they try to maser new academic content. The state lists

reasons for referring an English learner to special education, which includes exhibiting behavioral and cultural difficulties in both the first and second language, demonstrating limited academic progress over time, and performing differently from their peers.

District Newcomer Policies

The English language learner department in the participating site "is dedicated to ensuring that our English language learners throughout the district receive the best education possible" (Becker, 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, "teachers are working hard to create the same learning opportunities for our English language learners that are afforded all students in the district" (Becker, 2019, p. 1). The district's services for English language learners and newcomers include a welcome center, a bilingual parent coordinator, a comprehensive curriculum, a parent handbook, and access to a bilingual social worker.

Data Collection

Four forms of data were used for this study: (a) interviews, (b) a reflective journal, (c) field notes constructed from participant observations, and (d) secondary source artifacts. Lawrence and Tar (2013) indicated the multiplicity of data sources was a crucial step to information credibility in qualitative research. Many have corroborated this notion, insisting information is likely to be gathered from multiple sources when conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2014).

Interviews. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with each participant in a person-to-person format. All interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. Interviewing was a beneficial and appropriate data collection method because it allowed the teacher-researcher to hear and record participants' stories and experiences.

Additionally, the semi-structured interview process allowed for broad and general questions to be asked related to experiences as refugee students with limited-interrupted formal education. The interview protocols were designed using constructs from critical race, LatCrit, community cultural wealth, and resiliency theories to understand better the power structures that framed this study. Creswell (2014) affirmed a researcher could use the interview process to understand shared experiences in qualitative research; Creswell (1998) recommended a researcher should use "long interviews with up to 10 people" (p. 65) for a phenomenological study. Some follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify details and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

Researcher journal. Another source of data was a reflective journal where the teacher-researcher recorded reactions, assumptions, expectations, and biases that arose during the research process. The researcher wrote memos after completing the data collection for the day. The use of a reflective journal served as an audit trail or detailed descriptions of how data were collected, categories were derived, and decisions were made throughout the inquiry process (see Merriam, 2009).

Participant observations and field notes. Observation provides the researcher-teacher with a firsthand account of the situation under study (Merriam, 2009). Through observations, the researcher-teacher gained an understanding of the experiences of students in the newcomer classroom including challenges, joys, and frustrations as they attended U.S. schools. Observations provided detailed descriptions of the learning objectives that the students were asked to master, what the students were required to do, how the students were required to make sense of the information being learned, and the performance of attempted tasks.

The researcher-teacher's field notes included recording what was heard, seen, and experienced, through memos, an important data source that the researcher used in this study (see Charmaz, 2006). Memos helped the researcher-teacher maintain a balance between descriptive and reflective notes including, hunches, impressions, feelings, beliefs, and biases.

Artifacts. Student work samples, schedules, program information, and curriculum documents were collected to bolster the researcher's understanding of the activities that limited-interrupted formal education students were engaged in the academic setting. Documentation related to the newcomer program included course offerings throughout the school year and during the summer months. Additionally, documents and artifacts provided data for analyzing the context in which teaching and learning occurred.

Data Analysis

Patton (2015) defined *processing* the data as the exercise of "reducing the volume of raw information, sifting the trivial from the significant, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal" (p. 521). During the process of transcribing, as the researcher became acquainted with the data, meaningful categories and themes arose. From the abundance of raw field notes and verbatim transcripts, the researcher-teacher engaged in the process of coding. In this section, the researcher explains the procedures used to analyze each strand of data.

Interviews. The researcher transcribed student, teacher, and administrator interviews word-by-word and saved these under a pseudonym. Through initial, axial, and selective coding, codes emerged from the interview data (Charmaz, 2006). For Case 1, the initial codes included *navigate the system, teacher support, positive role models,*

resiliency, will power, self-responsibility, motivated, goal oriented, land of opportunity, patience, perspective, and *reaction to events*. For Case 2, the initial codes included *work, negative association, reaction to situation, low effort, absences, family conflict, low family support, value of education, lack of role model, no clear goals*, and *process of trauma/emotional issues*. These codes were compared and analyzed further until the final emergent themes captured the essence of students' experiences. For Case 1, the final emergent themes included *navigate the system, positive role models, resiliency, goal-oriented*, and *perspective*. For Case 2, the final emergent themes included *choices, family conflict, lack of role model*, and *process of trauma*. The same procedures were followed for each case.

Researcher journal. The researcher's reflective journal was kept during the research process. After the interviews, reflective journal data were analyzed, and the final emergent themes were captured. The researcher journal yielded the themes *resiliency, special education services, family conflict*, and *Hispanic teacher*. The researcher followed initial, axial, and selective coding for the journal entries (see Charmaz, 2006). The researcher conducted constant comparison in the analysis of the journal entries. Finally, the codes emerged from the reflective journal themes.

Participant observations and field notes. The researcher analyzed the field notes constructed from participant observations, specifically in the newcomer program and Spanish native classes. The researcher analyzed and compared the data to the interview data for each case. The codes included *organizational support, Spanish support*, and *willpower*.

Artifacts. Secondary source artifacts and documents, including student schedules, the newcomer program information booklet, the newcomer program summer school booklet, an invitation to the English language learner teachers to present at the state level, curriculum documents, and student work, were collected for the researcher to understand the contextual factors that impact the educational experiences of students with limited-interrupted education. The researcher conducted the constant comparison method in the analysis of the artifacts by comparing this data to the other sources of data. Through inductive analysis and constant comparison, the codes that emerged included *organizational support*, *Spanish support*, and *special education services*.

Coding scheme. Charmaz (2006) described the following about coding:

> Open, line-by-line coding as breaking the data up into their parts or properties; defining the actions on which they rest; looking for tacit assumptions; explicating implicit actions and meanings; crystallizing the significance of the points; comparing data with data; identifying gaps in the data. (p. 50)

Coding is an essential step in making sense of data. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), "codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study" (p. 56). In this study, during the initial coding process, codes related to a common theme were organized into concepts, which were similar codes set into groups. First, the interview data were coded separately for each case. Then, the researcher coded the researcher's reflective journal, the field notes constructed from participants observations, and the secondary source data. The researcher used open coding for each data strand, which resulted in 37 open codes summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Open Codes by Data Strand

Data source	Open codes	Code description
Interviews	Case 1	
	Navigate system	The capacity of students to navigate the school environment for their own advancement
	Teacher support	The academic, emotional, and moral support that teachers offer to students
	Positive role models	The people that mentor students, befriend them, and aid them in their development in a positive way
	Resiliency	The personal strength possessed to face difficult obstacles
	Willpower	The strong desire to continue to work toward one's goals
	Self-responsibility	One's ownership of one's actions and behaviors
	Motivation	One's desire to reach future goals
	Goal-oriented	The stance student participants possess as a state of mind
	Land of opportunity	The belief that in the United States, a good future is possible with effort and hard work
	Patience	The understanding that personal growth and achievement take time
	Perspective	The awareness and consciousness of one's place in one's environment
	Reaction	The way one reacts to particular situations
	Case 2	Students' priority of making an income over obtaining an education
	Work	The negative influences students have
	Negative association	How students cope with difficult situations
	Reaction to situation	The lack of effort students make toward advancing their education
	Low effort	The amount of time students miss school
	Absences	The conflict that students experience with members of their family and/or other guardians
	Family conflict	

Data source	Open codes	Code description
	Low family support	The lack of guidance and support students have at home
	Value of education	The value given to obtaining a formal education
	Lack of role model	The availability of mentors and adults that can guide students' path
	No clear goals	The absence of a future plan or goal
	Process of trauma/emotional issues	How deep trauma affects the well-being of students
Observations	Value of education	The value given to obtaining a formal education
	Process of trauma/emotional issue	How deep trauma affects the well-being of students
	Teacher support	The academic, emotional, and moral support that teachers offer to students.
	Will power	The strong desire to continue to work towards one's goals.
	Resiliency	The personal strength possessed to face difficult obstacles.
	Motivation	One's desire to reach future goals
	Spanish Support	The Spanish support given to Spanish speaking students
Researcher Journal	Special Education Services	The specific instruction designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities.
	Family Conflict	The conflict that students experience with members of their family and/or other guardians
	Resiliency	The personal strength possessed to face difficult obstacles.
	Hispanic Teacher	The teachers of Hispanic descent.
	Process of trauma/emotional issue	How deep trauma affects the well-being of students
Secondary Source	Teacher support	The academic, emotional, and moral support that teachers offer to students.
	Special Education Services	The specific instruction designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities.

Data source	Open codes	Code description
	Organizational Support	The organizational support provided to students in the form of programs, curriculum, and scheduling.
	Spanish Support	The Spanish support given to Spanish speaking students

Thematic analysis includes grouping each coded item into similar groups, and then classifying these into major themes. Thematic analysis in this study yielded a total of fourteen major themes. Braun and Clark (2006) described thematic analysis as "a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (p. 79). Moreover, the review process during data collection and analysis (i.e., constant comparison) is the follow-up process through which the concept and categories that emerge from initial analysis are applied to other data to establish compatibility (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Table 4 summarizes the major themes in this study according to data source.

Table 4

Major Themes by Data Source

Data source	Major themes	Code description
Interviews	Case 1	
	Navigate the System	The capacity of students to navigate the school environment for their own advancement
	Positive Role Models	The people that mentor students, befriend them, and aid them in their development in a positive way
	Resiliency	The personal strength possessed to face difficult obstacles
	Goal-Oriented	
	Perspective	The stance student participants possess as a state of mind.

Data source	Major themes	Code description
	Case 2	
	Choices	The awareness and consciousness of one's place in one's environment
	Family Conflict	
	Lack of role model	
	Process of trauma	The personal decisions that students make pertaining to their time and energy
		The conflict that students experience with members of their family and/or other guardians
		The availability of mentors and adults that can guide students' path
		How deep trauma affects the well-being of students
Observations	Organizational Support	The organizational support provided to students in the form of programs, curriculum, and scheduling.
	Spanish Support	The academic support given to Spanish-speaking students.
	Willpower	The strong desire to continue to work toward one's goals.
Researcher Journal	Resiliency	The personal strength possessed to face difficult obstacles
	Special Education Services	The specific instruction designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities.
	Family Conflict	The conflict that students experience with members of their family and/or other guardians
	Hispanic Teacher	The teachers that are of Hispanic descent.
Secondary Source	Organizational Support	The organizational support provided to students in the form of programs, curriculum, and scheduling.
	Spanish Support	The academic support given to Spanish-speaking students.

Data source	Major themes	Code description
	Special Education Services	The specific instruction designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities.

The present researcher applied constant comparison to the following four data strands: (a) interviews, (b) researcher's reflective journal, (c) field notes constructed from participants' observations, and (d) secondary source data. Kim (2015) outlined the process:

> So, first you will go through multiple coding processes in which you attempt to find a word or short phrase that can be an attribute for a portion of your data. Then, you find relations between similar codes and combine them to make a category. And then, you identify an emerging pattern in each category, which then can be built as a theme. (p. 188)

After the researcher examined the raw data and reduced these data to themes through the coding and recoding processes, the researcher organized the final codes and emergent themes in specific tables for each data strand.

Memoing, coding, drafting, and writing. Analytic memos were written throughout the data collection stage of the study. As Charmaz (2006) recommended, writing memos is a critical practice for researchers to analyze the data and create codes during the research process, as well as to remind researchers of key ideas at later stages of analysis. The researcher used these memos to organize information, block the data, and form categories that could then be examined wholly using the selected theoretical lenses. In this study, the researcher-teacher used the reflective journal to record emerging questions, concerns that required further investigation, and reflective entries.

Cross-case analysis. After conducting narrative analysis within each individual case, the researcher conducted a cross-case analysis to compare and contrast the findings between cases. The analysis of data in this multiple-case study was conducted in two stages. Within-case analysis was conducted for two individual cases followed by a cross-case theme analysis. Each case was treated as a comprehensive case. First, the researcher secured the case record, which

> pulls together and organizes the voluminous case data into a comprehensive, primary resource package. The case record includes all the major information that will be used in doing the case analysis. Information is edited, redundancies are sorted out, parts are fitted together, and the case record is organized for ready access either chronologically or topically. The case record must be completed but manageable. (Patton, 2015, p. 537)

Once the analysis of each case and data strand was completed, the cross-case theme analysis began. This level of analysis resulted in a unified description across cases.

The cross-case analysis involved analyzing the data and identifying strategies that could be identified for the improvement of school policies, programs, and support services. The cross-case analysis in the study comprised an in-depth description and interpretation of each case followed by a comparison of data among the cases, and continuously looping back to previous cases. The within-case analysis entailed an intensive analysis that occurred for each case study, which was completed by the researcher once data were organized and specific data could be located. The teacher-researcher created a visual representation of the steps taken during the data analysis process. Figure 1 is a visual depiction of the individual case analysis and cross-case

analysis that guided the researcher in this study to provide an in-depth portrait of the phenomenon under study (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Cross-case data are important because a researcher can use these data to make generalizations and better understand the data (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

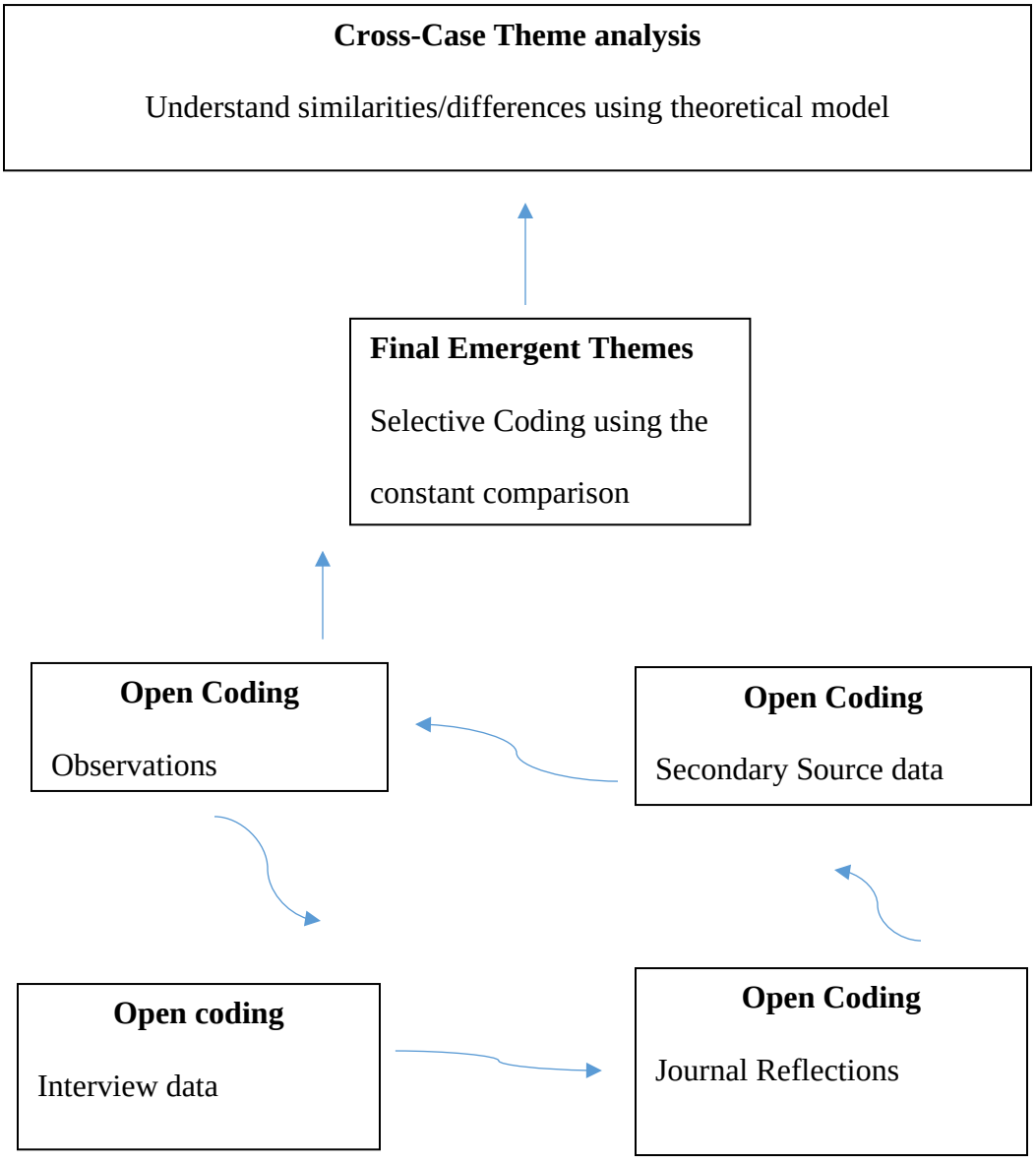

Figure 1. Template for coding a multiple-case study.

Credibility/Validity

Credibility in qualitative research refers to whether the reconstructions of the researcher are credible representations of the original reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Maxwell (2013) defined *qualitative validity* as "the correctness or credibility of a

description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (p. 122). Qualitative researchers must establish a high degree of trustworthiness in qualitative studies; the credibility of a researcher's findings remain contingent on whether he or she has established trustworthiness (Patton, 2015).

Patton (2015) offered several strategies for enhancing the quality and credibility of a qualitative study, and he stressed the importance of addressing the issue as transparently as possible. The researcher-teacher was the instrument in qualitative inquiry, and although no definitive list of questions existed that must be addressed to establish investigator credibility, "the principle is to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation, either negatively or positively, in the minds of users of the findings" (Patton, 2015, p. 700). Consequently, the credibility of the findings and conclusions depends on the researcher-teacher's careful attention to establishing trustworthiness with the participants and, in so doing, fortifying their correspondence against subjectivity or sensationalization (Patton, 2015). The researcher-teacher kept a reflective journal throughout the data collection process. The journal served as an audit trail of how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry process by the qualitative researcher.

Two forms of triangulation served to establish credibility: source triangulation and theory triangulation. The researcher used multiple sources of data to present a richer and more in-depth picture of the findings. According to Patton (2015), "different kinds of data can be brought together in a case study to illuminate various aspects of a phenomenon" (p. 662). Theoretical triangulation, when analyzing and interpreting the

results, provided a framework for analyzing different explanatory variables. For example, critical race theory and community cultural wealth helped the researcher-teacher establish the different forms of capital that students had used to achieve success.

Potential threats to credibility in the form of observer bias and observer effects in the observation and interview processes were addressed. Member checks was used by sharing researcher-teacher's interpretations and conclusions with student participants to check interpretations against their perspectives. This process was followed both informally (during data collection) as well as more formally (after the data were coded), throughout the research process.

Chapter IV: Results

The researcher used a critical phenomenological research approach and a multiple case study research design to investigate the experiences of Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education. The researcher incorporated the documented experiences of students, as told from their perspectives. The perspectives of school administrators, teachers, and support staff working directly with student participants supported the results of this study. The goal of this study was to give a voice to Central American student refugees as a disenfranchised and vulnerable population of students so that they might influence the planning of their educations. Dual perspectives were used to explain the experiences of students who were successful and the experiences of limited-interrupted formal education students who struggled. This study also identified the differences through other lenses, specifically critical race, LatCrit, community cultural wealth, and resiliency theories. Critical race and LatCrit theories served as the overarching lens and provided the researcher with an avenue to analyze the local educational context of the study. Community cultural wealth and resiliency theories provided the researcher with an avenue to analyze the results for similarities and differences among the two groups of students.

This chapter presents the results of the four forms of data analysis in dominant themes from the two case studies, defined as successful and struggling, and both are analyzed separately. Initial, focused, and axial coding procedures were employed in the analysis of interviews, the teacher-researcher journal, field notes constructed from participant observations, and secondary source data. The researcher relied on constant comparison to allow for the most theoretically prevalent themes and categories to emerge

(see Charmaz, 2006). The results of the data collected in this research study are presented by each data strand, and then broken into subtheme descriptors, which are labeled as codes.

Teacher-researcher reflective journal. The teacher-researcher's journals were analyzed using constant comparison, initial, axial, and selective coding that resulted in four pertinent themes: Resilience; Special Education Services; Family Conflict; and Hispanic Teacher. Table 5 operationally defines codes that resulted in themes associated with the teacher-researcher's reflective journal.

Table 5

Researcher Reflective Journal Codes

Code	Operational definition
Resiliency	The personal strength possessed to face difficult obstacles
Special Education Services	The specific instruction designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities.
Family Conflict	The conflict that students experience with members of their family and/or other guardians
Hispanic Teacher	The teachers that are of Hispanic descent.

Resiliency. Successful and struggling students worked hard to learn English and accumulate credits toward their high school diploma while facing internal struggles of trauma and external obstacles, such as racism and bullying. Observations of successful students confirmed the importance of working hard and being resilient despite struggling with some of the assignments required for class.

Student 6 presented on her immigration experience in her Native Spanish class. She described her immigration journey and her experience as a sexual assault victim. Nevertheless, through tears, she gave a thoughtful and well-presented presentation.

Student 6, motivated by her experience as a sexual assault survivor, will one day educate women in her country on sexual and domestic violence. According to the researcher's journal and student interviews, many of the female participants in both cases were victims of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse was a prevalent theme from the female participants.

Student 5 struggled to finish assignments in Spanish and English classes, however, she used her sweet demeanor and smile to connect well with her teachers. Student 5 refused to give up, sought assistance from teachers, working tirelessly until she was finished with her assignments. As a sexual assault survivor, she reacted positively to traumatic experiences, and expressed a strong sense of agency.

Student 7 spent several months trying to cross the US border. Having been left as a toddler with an extended family member in his native country, he was finally reunited with his grandfather. As a recent newcomer, he was eager to tell his story and thankful to be in an American school. His maturity at the young age of 16 was impressive. He talked about never having met his father, being abandoned by his mother, and the importance of avoiding problems. In class, he had a great ear for the English language, even though he'd been in and out of school for several years. Student 7 asked more questions than anyone.

Special Education Services. Special education services are defined as the specific instructions and accommodations designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. Students 9 and 10 struggled to complete writing tasks in their Spanish classes and both had a difficult time answering higher order thinking questions. Although these students had a difficult time working through classroom assignments, they were not

classified as qualifying for special education services and were not provided any accommodations.

After conducting classroom observations and interviews with some of the struggling students, the teacher-researcher conducted follow-up conversations with school administrators and the bilingual social worker. In these conversations, according to Educator 6, the following was revealed:

> A lack of bilingual psychologists and bilingual Special Education teachers [exists]. Many problems are passed on as language but would certainly be special education issues. The district is not doing the right thing when it comes to students with limited-interrupted formal education.

The "right thing" would be to provide adequate Special Education services to students with limited-interrupted education that have learning disabilities. However, distinguishing between a learning disability and a language difference can be difficult. According to the district's Special Education presentation, "behaviors due to language difference are similar to behaviors due to language disability."

Some struggling students might have learning disabilities and were not being tested. Student work artifacts reveal that some struggling students were unable to finish assignments when compared to peers with similar backgrounds. However, confirming whether struggling students' difficulties, according to Educator 1, "are a result of an emotional disturbance, trauma, or a learning disability would require testing."

Special Education testing requires a parent or adult in the school must make a referral or request, and according to Educator 1, "unfortunately, the parents of students with limited-interrupted formal education are unfamiliar with Special Education

programs and uneducated on the topic of learning disabilities." For example, the bilingual social worker recalled parents describing their students as "slow" when they actually had learning disabilities. During a follow-up conversation with Educators 2, 3, and 4, it was revealed the school policy was to test students once they had been in the United States for 3 to 5 years. For secondary students with limited-interrupted education, delayed testing would present a problem.

Family conflict. The researcher-teacher faced concern for the conflict that students experienced in their own homes. In a follow-up conversation with the bilingual social worker, she described how parents could not deal with the stress of having a teenager in the home. The bilingual social worker indicated one parent would say, "I will send her back." Families also experienced difficulty in adjusting after having spent many years apart.

Hispanic teacher. With a high Hispanic population in the district, the human resource office does not have the resources to hire enough minority teachers, yet according to Educator 6, leaders were "hiring young and white teachers." Most of the Spanish teachers in the school were of Hispanic descent. All English language learner teachers were white as were all teachers in the English department. Although the district's student population is 49% Hispanic, only 7% are Hispanic teachers (Papp, 2019). The school administrator revealed that although she has recommended Hispanic teachers to be hired, only eight out of the 122 teachers are of Hispanic descent.

Field notes/participant observations. The researcher-teacher constructed field notes from participant observations. The researcher-teacher observed classes in the

Newcomer program and native Spanish classes, including one Newcomer Math class, and two Newcomer English classes.

The classroom observations are summarized in Table 6, which highlights the codes associated with this data strand.

Table 6

Field Notes/Participant Observations

Code	Operational definition
Organizational Support	The organizational support provided to students in the form of programs, curriculum, and scheduling.
Spanish Support	The academic support given to Spanish-speaking students.
Willpower	The strong desire to continue to work toward one's goals.

Organizational support. Classroom observations by the researcher-teacher indicated that teachers in the Newcomer and Spanish classrooms provided engaging and rigorous lessons. Students were engaged in a variety of learnings tasks. These tasks included independent work, group and partner activities, projects, and presentations. During the classroom observations, teachers posted learning objectives. For example, in Spanish Native 1, students were required to describe themselves and others. Students participated in whole class instruction by answering questions posited by the teacher on individual white boards. The teacher checked for comprehension based on students' responses. Then, students worked together to introduce and describe one another. In Spanish Native 2, students debated on a topic in groups and in front of a panel of student volunteers. Students from both groups gave articulate arguments for and against the topic.

In the Newcomer English class, students gave basic instructions in English on how to do a worldly task. For homework, students were required to bring in props to

complete the task. Students worked in groups and practiced giving commands with their props. In another Newcomer English class observation, students were required to identify and use prepositions. To meet this learning objective, the teacher required students to engage in a variety of learning activities: following teacher commands and working with a partner by asking and answering questions using a visual.

Secondary source data and artifacts, such as curriculum documents and student work, support the classroom observations. Teachers' lessons and instruction matched the standards and learning tasks described in the Newcomer comprehensive curriculum document as well as the Spanish curriculum document. Student work samples, including presentations and projects, aligned with the classroom observations demonstrating fidelity of the implementation.

Spanish support. Classroom observations of Spanish classes were used to gain an understanding of the language support provided to students in their native language. Observations by the researcher-teacher of native Spanish classes indicated teachers would adapt their instruction to meet the needs of students with limited-interrupted education. For example, Native 1 Spanish classes focused on developing students with low abilities in Spanish reading and writing. Spanish classes ranged from an introductory class, focusing on simple subjects and basic grammar structures, to demanding classes requiring students to analyze literature, conduct research, prepare presentations, and demonstrate other college level preparation skills.

Teachers' interviews supported the classroom observations. Teachers reported a range of abilities within the Spanish classes. For example, teachers stated some students had difficulty with the alphabet and conjugating simple verbs. The course sequence and

introductory level course were modified to meet the needs of struggling students with limited-interrupted formal education. The previous introductory course offered was too advanced for many students. As such, the new course became geared towards students with gaps in formal education.

Willpower. During classroom observations, students worked hard on learning tasks. They asked questions, maintained positive attitudes, and helped one another. For example, when students presented on the immigration journey, a difficult and personal subject, the class remained attentive and quiet, and applauded at the end of each presentation. Also, during a class in which students had to debate on a case based on the first amendment of the constitution, a difficult topic that required students to work together and debate against another group, students came prepared and participated. In this class, every student was engaged and interested in the topic.

Secondary source artifacts. The documents and artifacts have provided the teacher-researcher a source of data for analyzing the contextual issues that might affect why some students with limited-interrupted education have achieved success or struggled. The researcher collected and analyzed student schedules, the newcomer program information booklet, the newcomer program summer school booklet, an invitation to the English language learner teachers to present at the state level, curriculum documents, and student work. These sources of data were coded for themes. Table 7 summarizes the data in three codes.

Table 7

Secondary Source Artifacts

Code	Operational definition
Organizational Support	The organizational support provided to students in the form of programs, curriculum, and scheduling.
Spanish Support	The academic support given to Spanish-speaking students.
Special Education Services	The specific instruction designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities.

Organizational support. Organizational support was a prevalent theme in secondary data sources and the interviews. The English language learner district administrator implemented the newcomer program after data indicated students with limited-interrupted formal education were failing courses and exhibited a high dropout rate. According to the newcomer program booklet, leaders of this program sought to "prepare students for regular course sequence," thereby improving "basic literacy, vocabulary, and conversation skills."

Additionally, the newcomer program comprehensive curriculum document revealed the standards, concepts, and skills that students had to master by the end of the program in language, social studies, and math. Also, native Spanish curriculum documents showed the academic progress that was possible for students through proper course sequencing. Both curriculum documents supported students' academic progress through a common and well-designed template that guided teachers' instruction.

Student work, in the form of writing and project samples, substantiated the findings from the classroom observations and student interviews, pertaining to organizational support. Students engaged in a variety of writing tasks, cross- cultural

comparisons, and reflections. However, student work collected from Spanish, Math, and English teachers did indicate that some students struggled so much that they could barely produce the required assignment. For example, some students could not write one paragraph to support a main idea.

According to an invitation to present at the state level, the district was selected by the state to present "about all the things that we do to help our ELLs succeed including SIOP training for mainstream teachers and curriculum work." Furthermore, the newcomer summer school booklet documented offerings of "free English as a Second Language, Free ESL/Math Foundation Combination, and Free Transition English" during the summer months. Students who failed these courses during the school year could retake courses during the summer.

Students' schedules indicated instructional support and academic periods were provided for students during the school day. All students had at least one instructional support block. These class periods gave the students the opportunity to seek extra help, complete homework, and study; nevertheless, results from follow-up conversations with school administrators indicated that the district had not provided organizational support in three ways:

> English Language Learners Welcome Center staff only employs part-time employees, and none possess certification in teaching or in English Language; the District does not take steps to recruit minority teachers; and there is a lack of appropriate dissemination of information practices.

At the school level, results indicated school policies could promote better outcomes for students. According to Educator 4, "scheduling of too many study halls

posits a problem" for students with limited-interrupted formal education who need to accumulate credits toward graduation in a short amount of time. There is a lack of teachers and support staff who are certified as bilingual. The school has brought in outside agencies to address some of the issues with students with limited-interrupted education; according to Educator 4, these agencies may "lack accountability and consistency in administering services." Although organizational support provides students many opportunities to achieve a high school diploma, the school system can improve in the following areas: Spanish Supports and Special Education Services.

Spanish support. Spanish support is the instruction designed to aid Spanish-speaking students in developing and maintaining literacy in their first language. All students were enrolled in native Spanish language classes as seen in students' schedules. Curriculum documents indicated a course sequence beginning in Regular Native Spanish 1 and ending in rigorous courses, such as International Baccalaureate Spanish Literature, for Spanish-speaking students seeking to take courses geared toward the International Baccalaureate Diploma. Data from student interviews indicated students with limited-interrupted education valued the opportunity to develop and maintain literacy in the Spanish language.

Special Education Services. Classroom observations and student work indicated that some struggling students had a difficult time completing assignments. Some students could not express simple ideas or follow simple instructions in math. Student work indicated, that even in comparison to peers with similar backgrounds, some students struggled with comprehension and completing assignments. Some struggling students did not receive any accommodations to complete the work.

Interviews. Interviews with student participants, teachers, and administrators were coded for the themes and underwent the "constant comparison" method. Table 7 shows the codes and operational definitions. Case 1 had 12 subthemes (codes), resulting from the qualitative interviews; these subthemes were broken into five major themes. Case 2 had 11 subthemes (codes) broken into four major themes. Each emergent theme and its operational definition within the context of this study appears in Table 8 for Case 1 and Table 9 for Case 2.

Table 8

Case 1 Code Names

Initial code	Operational definition
Navigate system	The capacity of students to navigate the school environment for their own advancement
Teacher support	The academic, emotional, and moral support that teachers offer to students
Positive role models	The people that mentor students, befriend them, and aid them in their development in a positive way
Resiliency	The personal strength possessed to face difficult obstacles
Willpower	The strong desire to continue to work toward one's goals
Self-responsibility	One's ownership of one's actions and behaviors
Motivation	One's desire to reach future goals
Goal-oriented	The stance student participants possess as a state of mind
Land of opportunity	The belief that in the United States, a good future is possible with effort and hard work
Patience	The understanding that personal growth and achievement take time
Perspective	The awareness and consciousness of one's place in one's environment
Reaction	The way one reacts to particular situations

Table 9

Case 2 Code Names

Initial code	Operational definition
Work	Students' priority of making an income over obtaining an education
Negative association	The negative influences students have
Reaction to situation	How students cope with difficult situations
Low effort	The lack of effort students make toward advancing their education
Absences	The amount of time students miss school
Family conflict	The conflict that students experience with members of their family and/or other guardians
Low family support	The lack of guidance and support students have at home
Value of education	The value given to obtaining a formal education
Lack of role model	The availability of mentors and adults that can guide students' path
No clear goals	The absence of a future plan or goal
Process of trauma/emotional issues	How deep trauma affects the well-being of students

The initial coding phase yielded 12 codes for Case 1: Successful Students and 11 codes for Case 2: Struggling Students, which were from common responses from student, teacher, and administrator participants. For Case 1, these codes included navigate the system, teacher support, positive role models, resiliency, will power, self-responsibility, motivated, goal oriented, land of opportunity, patience, perspective, and reaction to events. For Case 2, these included work, negative association, reaction to situation, low effort, absences, family conflict, low family support, value of education, lack of role model, no clear goals, and process of trauma/emotional issues.

With the data collection process and its subsequent analysis, codes were then merged based on similarities of the responses. After creating individual codes, the codes were placed into code groups, which were categories of each code based on similarities.

The researcher found common themes and combined the codes, resulting in five final emergent themes for Case 1 and four final emergent themes for Case 2.

For Case 1, the first code group included the themes of navigate the system and teacher support. These themes were both categorized under navigate the system. The second code group included the theme of positive role models. The third code group included the themes of resiliency, will power, motivated, and self-responsibility. These were categorized under resiliency. The fourth code group included the themes of goal oriented, land of opportunity, and patience. These were placed under the theme of goal oriented. The fifth code group included the themes of perspective, reaction to events, and consciousness of status. These were all categorized under the code of group perspective. Table 10 shows the final five code groups for Case 1, which include navigate the system, positive role models, resiliency, goal-oriented, and perspective.

For Case 2, the first code group included the themes work, negative associations, reaction to negative events, low effort, and absences. These codes were categorized under choices. The second code group included family conflict, low family support, and value of education. These were all categorized under family conflict. The third code group included the themes lack of role model and no clear goals. These were placed under the theme of lack of role model. The fourth code group included process of trauma and emotional issues. They were all categorized under the code group process of trauma. Table 11 identifies the code groups for Case 2, which include choices, family conflict, lack of role models, and process of trauma.

Table 10

Case 1 Initial Code Groups and Final Emergent Themes

Code group	Theme
Navigate the system, teacher support	Navigate the System
Positive role models	Positive Role Models
Resiliency, willpower, motivated, self-responsibility	Resiliency
Goal-oriented, land of opportunity, patience	Goal-Oriented
Perspective, consciousness of status	Perspective

Table 11

Case 2 Initial Code Groups and Final Emergent Themes

Code group	Theme
Work, negative associations, reaction to situations, low effort, absences	Choices
Family conflict, low family support, value of education	Family Conflict
Lack of role models, no clear goals	Lack of Role Model
Process of trauma, emotional issues	Process of Trauma

Case 1 Themes: Successful Students

Navigating the system-teacher support. Navigating the system was operationally defined as the capacity of students to navigate the school environment for their own advancement. Navigating the system was a recurring theme found throughout the interview data. Both historical and initial findings within research indicated successful students would capitalize on the resources provided by the school primarily by looking for help from teachers, administrators, and other support staff. These students would embrace teacher support and guidance; additionally, they would seek opportunities for extra assistance in classes and after-school, and they valued prosocial advice. Student 6 credited the school counselors and teachers with preparing her for college:

> Thanks to this school, I am at the level that I am. My counselors try their best to help me find scholarships to go to college, they have helped me with almost everything. Even though we are not American citizens, the school has helped us a lot.

Student 1 acknowledged the difficulties of transitioning from the foundations program through ESL courses and then to mainstream classes. On many difficult occasions, she had sought help from many adults: “There have been times that I have had very difficult classes, but I’ve looked for help. I’ve also asked my counselor for help many times and I have received a lot of help.” Students who make use of their connections within the educational and community setting, and who seek support from those around them, were more successful than those youth who did not display a similar resourcefulness.

A recurring theme of student profiles showed that successful students would advocate for themselves to advance. Successful students are resourceful and take advantage of the opportunities available to them. Student 1 recognized, “In this country, there is a lot of help and many programs. It’s important to look for something or someone that can help us advance.” Students might have to fight the system and openly challenge it, as Student 4 declared,

> One has to look for help. But there are people that don’t want to receive the help, so they leave. You have to have patience for all of that. It was difficult to get rid of my absences, but I fought for it.

Educator 1 pointed out students had to fight for their success:

> Many kids that have interrupted education they don't know how to fight for it, or they don't understand it so they say I can't do it and give up very quickly. So, I've found that's been a big drawback and it hurts their chances of success."

The types of support that students could access was notably broad; successful students would rely on teachers not only for academic support but also for emotional and moral support. Student 2 reflected on a particularly difficult time during the educational process and recalled the following:

> the teachers also find ways to help. I was alone for five months when I moved out of my father's home. I didn't have help from him during that time and my teachers would give me advice and they would help me with everything. And anything that I needed that they would help me because they wanted me to be okay. That would gave [*sic*] me consolation and would motivate me.

Student 4 recalled a specific teacher she connected with by sharing the following:

> Mrs. D. helped me a lot. I was with her for two years. She would always tell me, don't quit, to always do my work and that if I needed extra help, she would help me, and she did help me a lot.

During her senior year, Student 4 experienced a difficult situation and credited the support from members of the support staff as instrumental:

> I fell into a deep depression because my mother left back to our native country. The counselors and the school psychologist helped me so much. I was not coming to school and I was at a point of not graduating but they helped me with that.

All of the successful student participants praised their teachers for their support and patience. Apart from seeking academic support, successful students utilized their

teachers as mentors, tutors, and friends; for example, Student 6 said, “What I love the most are the teachers that inspire us to keep going forward toward our dreams. They tell us that we can, not to say that we can’t.” Student 7 acknowledged, “The teachers always try to help, and I think that they are very ethical because they try to push you. Mrs. O. has supported me a lot, all of the time.”

Positive role models. Positive role models are defined as people who mentor students, befriend them, and aid in students’ development in an advantageous way. According to student accounts, those students who have been deemed successful had at least one person that supported them on their educational journey. Student 4 described the support that she had always received from her grandmother and indicated her grandmother had encouraged her to “keep studying, don’t settle, and keep moving forward.” Student 5 mentioned her mother as the strongest and most positive support that had aided her success: “My mother wants me to finish a career, to be able to be something in life, someone important in life.” Additionally, Student 1 described her mother as a positive guide, who assisted her in identifying help, providing methods of dealing with difficult circumstances and delivering unconditional support: “My mother is always there for me, she supports me and tells me that I can do better.”

Gender identity of role models might have also been a factor noted by successful students. Male students described the male figures who had served as guiding voices in their lives. Student 7 described the moral support from his grandfather: “One has to listen to the experienced voice otherwise it will be bad for me in the future.” Student 2 described his conversations with his father. His father’s message to him had always been to never get lost in drugs and the importance of working hard in school to progress.

Student 2 admitted, “I’ve copied all of that from him and I have been doing everything possible to move forward and be able to have a good life and future.”

Resiliency. Resiliency is the personal strength possessed to face difficult obstacles. Successful students maintained a high level of motivation, will power, and a high degree of self-responsibility even in the face of difficult barriers. Several successful students referred to the importance of having a strong mindset; for example, Student 6 stated, “Even though I have faced many obstacles, they have made me who I am. I am stronger because of these experiences and I will be able to reach my dreams and my goals.” In referring to taking responsibility for one’s actions, Student 3 exclaimed,

> There are people that come and don’t help themselves to move forward. Not all of the work is in the hands of the teachers. One has to take advantage of the opportunities that this country offers us because we don’t have it in ours.

Success as a journey, rather than a destination, was an added theme in the research. Successful students had an understanding that success would only come in time and with continued effort, and it was an ongoing process requiring energy. Student 1 expressed, “You can’t achieve things quickly. Only little by little. You can’t leave school. You have to continue your education.” Additionally, Student 3 stated, “The more effort you put into your education the more you will learn.” Student 2 expressed, “In my home it is said that life here is hard and to obtain what you want you have to work very hard and put a lot of effort into your things.”

Several students maintained a positive mindset when facing difficult circumstances. Student 4 confessed,

> I was at the point where I said I can't continue anymore. A lot of my friends left school. But I began to think that staying in school requires will power. I've been in a difficult position, but I said to myself I can do this, and I will.

Some students reflected on difficult experiences they had undergone and could get through by focusing on the future. For example, Student 4 acknowledged, "I know that life is not easy, but it is possible. And at the end one will feel a personal satisfaction, and everything will be a thing of the past. Nothing is forever."

Goal oriented. Goal oriented is defined as the stance student participants possess as a state of mind. Over the course of the interviews, successful students spoke of their goal-oriented mindsets that they used to guide their decision making and actions. They understood that achieving one's goals would require a plan of action which was oriented toward a goal-driven outcome. For example, Student 5 stated, "You have to put in your mind I am going to do it. First you have to set your goals and write them. Then you have to write a plan of action on how to achieve your goals."

Every successful student had a clear future vision of themselves and of what they wanted to achieve in the next five years. For example, Student 3 exclaimed, "I want to be a chef," Student 1 said, "I am going to be an industrial engineer," Student 2 expressed, "I want to be a police officer," and Student 5 stated, "I want to be an elementary school teacher." Student 4 had high goals and declared, "I want to be my own boss. I would like to have my own brand. I am a very positive person and I can achieve it." Students could assign relevance to their current experiences; these would improve their futures, and a goal-oriented mindset assisted with this ongoing progress.

Successful students discussed ambitions beyond their current academic goals. They referenced ambitions beyond going to college and attaining a degree, sometimes citing over-arching life-goals and ways that they would aspire to influence the world. There are a few examples of these macro-level ambitions. Student 1described her interests in the environment: “My friend and I are also very interested in global contamination and we want to start a group to work toward combatting that. We will start little by little.” Student 6 spoke of her desire to help victims of sexual violence: “The first thing that I will do once I am a citizen is go back to my country and start a foundation to help women that have been victims of domestic and sexual violence.”

There was an understanding among successful students that achieving one’s goal required a continued level of patience. Student 4 acknowledged, “It’s important to stay in school. You cannot drop out, you have to continue, but little by little you will be successful, it won’t happen fast.” Student 2 said, “I have been doing everything possible to move forward and to be able to have a good life in the future.” Student 6 expressed, “You have to follow your dreams. You have to keep fighting. You can’t have excuses.”

Perspective. Perspective is the awareness and consciousness of one’s place in their environment. When confronted with difficult situations, successful students have made the choice to deal with problems in the way that would be most beneficial and prosocial. Often, the students had elected to handle challenges through a non-confrontational approach; for example, Student 6 described her way of dealing with difficult situations with teachers: “I don’t say anything. I don’t want problems.” Most students referenced that their immigration statuses in the country affected the way they

thought about getting into trouble, particularly as students who may be undocumented. For example, Student 7 expressed,

> I have dealt with the problems I have encountered by getting rid of them because I know what my status is in this country. And I have been given the opportunity to enter this country and I try to stay away as far as possible from any problems.

Student 2 said, "Some teachers feel that when you speak in Spanish that you are offending them, and I agree with them. They don't understand Spanish and they will think that we are saying bad things." The status of a student and a student's family as it relates to their legal citizenship is a powerful consideration within the day-to-day reactions that a student may display. This awareness may play a factor in students seeking support due to their concerns of deportation and penalization.

Case 2 Themes: Struggling Students

Choices. Choices are another prevalent theme that arose from the Case 2 data. Struggling students repeatedly made one or more decisions that impacted their grades, attendance requirements, or had a negative effect on their behavior. Students often made choices between competing factors, which they sometimes viewed as mutually exclusive. Students made the choice to go to work over school, to spend time with negative influences rather than positive ones, and to not put enough effort into their studies and focus on other involvements. Student 9 acknowledged the poor decisions that led to numerous course failures: "At the beginning I was doing better than now. I started to work, and I started to neglect school. I have failed several classes. Last year, I failed two." She also stated, "Sometimes, I don't do my part." She expressed, "Last year, I didn't have friends that helped me and motivated me." Describing how she chose to react

to difficult situations, she confessed, “Sometimes, I would get up and leave. If I would answer back, the teacher would send me to the office.”

Student 9 understood that the choices she made heavily influenced the outcome of her school success. She concluded by saying, “I started to work, and I was more worried about work and other things than about school.” Student 1, who dropped out of school and could not return, said, “I had to work. I wasn’t going to my classes and I had too many absences.”

The teachers all expressed frustration over the attendance issues that led many students to lose credit and drop out of school. Educator 2 stated, “I’ve had kids flat out tell me, ‘Hey, I’m not going to be in school tomorrow, I’m going to work,’ and I understand, but it has caused attendance issues which is huge.”

Family conflict. Conflict within the family was another theme that emerged from the qualitative data. Familial conflict took on many forms: the value of education held by the families, the low support given to students from the family, and the conflict that surfaces with family reunification. For example, Student 10 described his family’s view of the importance of high school graduation:

> They told me that I have to work and that if I wanted to keep studying that I study at night. My family has the belief that when you are 18 it’s your responsibility now to work and be responsible for oneself.

Student 9 described the low support she received at home: “I only live with my mother and she is also always working. We never have time to talk. She works every day.” Other students described the decision to move out of the family home due to the excessive conflict experienced; for example, Student 11 said, “My parents kicked me out

when I was 16. I didn't get along with them." Student 12 admitted, "I have failed many classes because I had problems with my father and my mother. I decided to live alone so the problems could remain apart. I don't have communication with my mother anymore."

Educator 1 expressed the prevalence of the difficulty of familial conflict after reunification after many years:

> They now have a second family, or they have kids that were born here, and the student gets here at the age of 15, 16, 17 and the connection isn't what they thought they'd expect and it's both sides. So, there is a lot of conflict.

Whether the challenges were due to a lack of access, or connectedness, or intergenerational conflict, family dynamic was a significant factor for the struggling student. These family conflicts were compounded by the various other stress factors that students underwent; seeking assistance to mitigate these family conflicts could expose family members to deportation, unemployment, or incarceration.

Lack of role models. The lack of role models was another prevalent theme that emerged from the data. Struggling students reported not having one person in their lives that they could rely on for academic support and guidance; for example, Student 9 stated, "I rarely receive support from my family. I only have my mother and she is barely with me."

Teachers also commented on the lack of mentors that seemed to be a common experience for struggling students. Educator 2 said,

> The biggest thing is they need mentors. They need people, whether it's peers or people who are older than them. They need to have people in their lives who they can look at and either get an idea or a sense of what the expectation is in the US

education system especially since they haven't been in a classroom in 1, 2, 3, 4 multiple years.

Other teachers shared the view that struggling students lacked the guidance that would provide academic support. Educators indicated that when missing this guidance, students would experience challenges in setting personal and professional goals, and they would struggle with establishing action plans and S.M.A.R.T. goals. Educator 1 expressed,

> Just because it's a connection to another world that they don't even see. I always ask the kids 'where do you see yourself in five years. Many kids say they haven't even thought about it. They don't have the ability to project their current situation. I think a mentor is good for that.

When students were not in the practice of establishing long and short term goals but were charged with managing their current state and the household well-being, academic progress appeared to decline due to the student functioning within a survival mode mindset.

Process of trauma. The influence of trauma on students' academics was another emergent theme from the data. Struggling students described the horrific events that they had experienced in the recent past and the difficulty in concentrating in their classes due to that emotional trauma. Student 10 declared, "I came much traumatized because of so many things that I couldn't concentrate in my classes and I failed many classes." Student 11 stated, "My sister was in a gang and she murdered my grandmother in front of me." Educator 4 confessed, "They have experienced so much more in their short lifetime than I have in my entire life so far."

Some struggling students had dealt with trauma on their own and resorted to risky behaviors: Student 9 expressed, “I would cut my arms,” and Student 11 stated, “I would drink and smoke to take my mind off of things.” This finding indicated a need to focus on addressing the socioemotional needs of students to address these experiences.

Cross-Case Analysis Results

The researcher-teacher conducted a with-in case analysis for Case 1 and Case 2. The researcher continued the analysis of the data to answer the cross-case research question: What can be learned when comparing successful and struggling Central American student refugees with a limited-interrupted formal education in terms of their academic achievement? Table 12 summarizes the comparison of the themes for successful and struggling students.

Table 12

Comparison of Themes for Successful and Struggling Students

Successful students	Struggling students
Navigate the System	Choices
Positive Role Models	Lack of Role Model
Goal-Oriented	No Clear Goals
Resiliency	Process of Trauma
Perspective	Reaction to Negative Situations

According to interviews, observations, and secondary source data, there are a number of factors that impacted student success including contextual factors, intrinsic characteristics, and external factors. In terms of contextual factors, the education system where students’ experiences took place, opportunities for academic success were provided, however, the system failed students in some areas. The newcomer program, Spanish courses, and teacher support aided in students’ success. On the contrary, lack of

Special Education services and consistent mental health access were detrimental to some struggling students.

Successful students possessed a goal-oriented mindset and relied on a strong sense of agency in making personal choices: in terms of how they spent their time and energy. According to student interviews, successful students had clear aspirations for the future and took accountability for their actions. They revealed their awareness of themselves as undocumented student refugees seeking to better their lives.

Contrary to struggling students' experiences, external factors, such as familial support, the support of role models, and institutional connections were capitalized on by successful students. Struggling students lacked family support, and instead, many experienced deep family conflict, according to student and teacher interviews. The lack of support from role models and missing social-emotional connections to the school resulted in course failures and dropping out of school.

Discussion of the Results

The first research question asked the following: Why do some Central American student refugees with a Limited-Interrupted Formal Education achieve academic success? Student participants from Case 1 overwhelmingly attributed school success to their goal-oriented mindsets, reliable support systems, and resiliency. Successful students had clear goals for the future and understood that reaching those goals would take a considerable amount of effort and time. Nevertheless, successful students did face numerous barriers based on what they had reported. In the face of difficult situations, successful students had sought help from family, teachers, administrators, and mental health professionals.

These students seemed equipped with the ability to identify supportive networks, which they had accessed during times of need.

The second research question asked the following: Why do some Central American student refugees with a Limited-Interrupted Formal Education struggle to see academic success? Student participants in the second case study all lacked a strong support system and a goal-oriented mindset. They often could not identify supportive others within their purview due to availability and negative experiences. Struggling students had difficult reunification incidences with their families and serious family conflict, which added layers of strain and disruption to positive and consistent relationships. These students would make choices that interfered with academic success, while navigating a tumultuous familial/community network or a lack thereof.

The third research question asked the following: What can be learned when comparing successful and struggling Central American student refugees with a limited-interrupted formal education in terms of their academic achievement? The data indicated although successful students made better choices out of their own free will in comparison to their struggling counterparts, other barriers were beyond factors of those students' own choices. Struggling students would deal with deep family conflict and trauma from the past. Struggling students' resiliency might have been negatively influenced by a lack of a strong support system; furthermore, some students were forced to live on their own or become independent of their family due to factors beyond their control. For some, the choice to work was not entirely made under their own volition; instead, they might have chosen to work as an important factor in maintaining a stable dynamic.

Summary of Results

The qualitative data indicated that there are intrinsic characteristics and external factors that can have an impact on students' success or lack thereof. It is possible that individual students' goal-oriented mindset and positive outlook can be attributed to their success. On the other hand, lacking certain personal attributes, such as having a sense of agency and coping positively under negative circumstances, can have a detrimental effect on one's resiliency.

Successful students had relied on a variety of capital to move toward their academic goals. They had proactively sought, developed, and maintained support systems that comprised family members, friends, trusted adults in the school building, and some in the community. They maintained a goal-oriented mindset and aspirations for the future. Students who struggled with academic success had experienced family conflict, did not have clear aspirations for the future, and made choices that further disenfranchised them from succeeding in school. This group of students also struggled with serious trauma from the past.

Chapter V: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Summary of the Results

This phenomenological multiple case study explained the critical experiences of Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education. This particular diaspora of students is labeled as English language learners and or English as a second language students, and they represent a large population of students within many districts across the country. The results of this study describe the experiences of two groups of students, successful and struggling. Furthermore, a cross-case theme analysis describes what can be learned from comparing both groups, to assist in the application of research findings. There is a variety of theoretical frameworks used throughout the study including critical race and LatCrit, community cultural wealth, and resilience theories. This chapter comprises the meaning of the results, how these are tied to the theoretical framework, and emergent theories from the findings. This chapter also indicated recommendations for future research and practice, as well as implications that may be applied to the practices of educators, administrators, and other stakeholders who work with these populations.

A goal of this study was to make Central American student refugees with a limited-interrupted formal education visible for practitioners, policymakers, and in the literature. Due to linguistic differences and other access challenges, these students are often at risk of having their perspectives dismissed or minimized, which may cause disengagement and ongoing struggles. The teacher-researcher desired to share their experiences so that changes could be implemented to benefit this vulnerable group of students. The researcher sought to highlight examples of successful students; as a teacher

first and a researcher second, the researcher saw that some students were succeeding against the odds, despite a lack of support or access. Conversely, this researcher had also witnessed students dropping out of school and later wishing to go back. The researcher identified the variety of factors that create such divergent outcomes, across diverse populations.

Sultana (2007) claimed concerns regarding "writing about" as opposed to "writing with" (p. 375) had led some researchers to avoid work with vulnerable populations. Furthermore, "ethical research is produced through negotiated spaces and practices of reflexivity that is critical about issues of positionality and power relations" (Sultana, 2007, p. 375). Critical research is essential and ethical work. The impetus to conduct this study derived from both personal and professional motives. As a teacher at the same school as the student participants, this researcher was in a position of trust. The students, teachers, and administrators who participated welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences, and this researcher-teacher was grateful to share their voices and perspectives through this study.

A literature review indicated students with a limited-interrupted formal education represented the neediest of English Learners. Researchers have defined this population of students as vulnerable because of their limited literacy, gaps in academic knowledge, and critical social and emotional needs (Custodio & Loughlin, 2017). According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, since 2012, the number of accompanied minors entering the refugee program has jumped dramatically, with 49,100 cases referred in 2018 with countries of origin including Guatemala (54%); El Salvador (12%); Honduras (26%); and other (8%). This research study included three students from Guatemala, four students

from El Salvador, and five students from Honduras to represent the larger population of Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education residing in the United States.

The findings of this research showed the challenges that student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education had encountered as they had resettled into their new families, communities, and school. Findings from the research and from student interviews in this study show that student refugees are appreciative of the opportunities available in the United States (Hos, 2016). As the participating students in this study adjusted to their new high schools, many expressed the need for psychological support and were aware of the challenges that they had escaped, and anticipated the challenges from their transitions properly.

According to Birman and Tran (2017), refugee students may experience acculturative stress (emotional turmoil arising from a detachment from some of their own identifying factors), migration stress, and the stress of learning a new language while adjusting to U.S. schools (Birman, n.d.). Furthermore, students who have experienced past trauma require ongoing psychological support to heal the wounds from their past and achieve a state of mind in which learning can take place, similar to a hierarchy of needs, their safety, sustenance and emotional supports must be met to foster educational curiosity and promote success (Hos, 2016). However, psychological and emotional support was not always readily available and consistent for students in this study, according to student and personnel interviews. Successful students in this study as revealed in the interviews, often sought the support of teachers, counselors, and other professionals to encompass supportive roles. Additionally, although struggling students

in this study often had support as well, the support was characteristically limited in its longevity and consistency, when available at all. Counseling was insufficient, where the breadth, depth, and access were lacking; however, many student refugees in this study were resilient and participated in extracurricular activities, while maintaining goal-oriented mindsets and hope for their future endeavors.

The data from this study indicated some students were achieving success, but many were struggling with academic failures, according to teacher and student interviews and classroom observations. The evidence, including curriculum documents, student work, classroom observations, and student interviews, indicated the newly implemented newcomer program and the English language learner program were aiding in students' success. The successful student participants demonstrated progress in acquiring English as revealed in teacher and student interviews. Also, students spoke passionately about the Newcomer program curriculum and the help that they received from the teachers. However, data including classroom observations and student work of some struggling student participants indicated the need for additional support services. For example, classroom observations revealed students struggled to complete academic work. Struggling students in this study suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression as a result of trauma from previous experiences, but were not identified, and did not receive consistent services. School administrators, teachers, and the social worker in this study discussed their concerns regarding the underserved population of students with limited-interrupted education with learning disabilities.

These interventions, including the implementation of the Newcomer program, Spanish courses designed to meet the needs of limited-interrupted education students, and

teachers committed to the success of student refugees, underscore the initial signs of progress, which need fortification. Struggling students in this study who require and are entitled to receiving special education services may not be receiving these services. However, testing would be required to know if struggling students' difficulties are a result of learning differences, trauma, or learning disabilities. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), language differences compounded with added learning differences create a specific population that is currently underserved. In this study, according to teacher and administrator interviews, many struggling students may not be receiving the Special Education services that students require. To support struggling students, school administration and policymakers should take thoughtful measures to meet the needs of students in their entirety.

Students' academic learning can be supported by valuing students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and by providing a safe and welcoming classroom environment (Thomas & Collier, 2002). According to student and teacher interviews, the Spanish curriculum documents, and classroom observations in this study, students capitalized on learning opportunities provided to them within a positive classroom environment. All student participants referenced being grateful for the opportunities provided to them through Spanish language classes in being able to maintain their language and learn more about their culture.

The study provided a multi-layered and applicable understanding of how to serve the needs of refugee students with a limited-interrupted formal education at the secondary level. Data from the student, teacher, and administrator interviews showed promising results from the newly implemented newcomer program. Successful students revealed

that they took advantage of courses offered during the summer and that they felt supported by the teachers in the newcomer program. School personnel, as revealed in administrator and teacher interviews, took pride in being selected by the State Department of Education (2015) to present on best practices. All students reported the teachers of the newcomer program were passionate and committed to meeting the needs of all students, even though it was challenging to provide them with necessary long-term emotional and psychological support. Thematically coded interviews with the district administrator, the English language learner department chair, and teachers highlighted that the school could act as a safe haven for struggling students by increasing positive learning experiences, providing students with social-emotional supports, and integrating them into the new culture.

The role and impact of teachers on the success of students was evident in the interviews, secondary source achievement data, and observations. Hos (2016) supported this finding in the literature, which stated that teachers play an essential role in providing the necessary support to help immigrant and refugee students to adjust to their new environments. Successful and struggling students in this study all referred to the way teachers responded to them, thereby showing the critical importance of rapport and relationship that transcends language and cultural differences. Student interviews indicated that rapport could be built if teachers learn their unique pasts and respond to their needs appropriately. Struggling students resisted some adverse interactions that occurred with teachers. Successful and struggling students valued teachers' attempts at understanding their individual stories, struggles, and obstacles and felt more comfortable and supported while they faced their adjustments.

The researcher utilized the qualitative case study approach of coding for the data collection and analysis processes. The codes that emerged from the variety of data sources were triangulated to provide a deeper understanding of the context. The multiple methods and data points used to gather information were important to ensure the validity and applicability of the findings. After analyzing each case, a cross-case thematic analysis was completed. Semi-structured interviews, field notes constructed from participant observations, reflective journal entries, and secondary source data showed that successful student participants possessed a combination of intrinsic characteristics and engaged with specific external factors that could impact student success. Based on the themes that arose from the four data strands, the researcher believed that the intrinsic characteristics that student participants possessed included being goal-oriented, having the capacity to navigate a complex system, and being positive-minded. Additionally, there were external factors that impacted students' resiliency, which included the lack of a role model, negative experiences in school, the effects of trauma, and family conflict. Moreover, the contextual factors that played a role in students' success or lack thereof, such as the power structures within the school that directly influenced this population of students, must be addressed.

The literature on resiliency gave this study a viable lens to compare successful and struggling students. First, intrinsic factors, as discussed in Chapter II under resiliency theory, refer to the dispositional attributes of individual children, such as positive mindset and disposition. Self-reflection and a strong sense of agency also influence resiliency. In this study, successful students demonstrated goal oriented mindsets, strong sense of selves, and clear plans for the future. Although successful students all experienced

trauma, they maintained a positive mindset and remained determined to react positively, even under negative circumstances. Struggling student participants made poor choices and often did not take responsibility for their actions.

Second, external factors, such as familial and organizational support, impact resiliency. Rutter (2013) explained that positive turning point experiences were necessary for people to move past trauma and non-resilient outcomes. Successful students in this study had positive role models in their families and made social-emotional connections in the school. Conversely, struggling student participants who experienced deep family conflict compounded with traumatic experiences had a more difficult time achieving success. The deep family conflict negatively affected students' resiliency. The school context provided opportunities for learning and growth; however, incidences of racism and bullying still occurred. Successful students, through a strong sense of agency and self-reflection practices, dealt with situations in prosocial ways.

The experiences of student refugees in this study were analyzed within context. Data obtained from secondary sources and observations were triangulated with student, administrator, and teacher interviews to provide the researcher with the contextual information necessary to understand the experiences of successful and struggling students fully. For example, the implementation of the Newcomer program to address deficient skills, the academic opportunities presented for students throughout the school year and summer months, the Spanish support that students receive, engaging and rigorous teacher instruction, and teacher support all provided students with tools to progress toward achieving their high school diploma. Successful student participants capitalized on these opportunities to achieve their goals. However, other contextual factors added difficulty

and stress for struggling students to achieve their goals including a lack of a mentorship program or special education services, a lack of certified bilingual teachers and support staff, racism and bullying, and no consistent mental and social-emotional support. Many of the external factors that can positively impact students' resiliency can be addressed by the school environment through improved policies, protocols, and programming.

Most important, policies, protocols, and programming can be improved by addressing the external factors that may be hindering students' success. Improved programming should include access to consistent mental health services and access to well-trained mentors. Policies and protocols pertaining to identifying special education students should be communicated properly and should follow federal and state laws, as outlined in Chapters II and III.

Conclusions

The theoretical model used to make sense of the experiences of students with limited-interrupted formal education was strongly supported by the results of this study. Critical race and LatCrit theories were used to explain the barriers that students with limited-interrupted education face in their academic journeys, specifically the policy and power structures within the educational context that may disenfranchise this particular group of students. Student participants in this study encountered the fear of deportation and penalization due to their immigration status, as described in student interviews and revealed in student work. Many student participants were questioned by teachers about their legal status in the country, and some student participants were subjected to racist and derogatory remarks on behalf of students and teachers. According to teacher

interviews, students' limited-interrupted education label was used to defer testing for Special Education testing.

Community cultural wealth theory was used to describe the capital that students with limited-interrupted education take advantage of to reach their academic goals. Community cultural wealth can be used to explain how struggling students lack certain capital and how this lack can impact their success. The findings of this study were consistent with Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, which rebukes the assumption that people of color lack the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. Yosso (2005) identified the following six sources of capital utilized by communities of color: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital, as defined in Chapter II. In this study, student participants combined and utilized a variety of capital to move forward toward earning a high school diploma. Successful students, to succeed in an education system not designed with them in mind, had to utilize networks of individuals to assist and guide them. These students mobilized resources in the form of supportive stakeholders in addition to work ethic, motivation, and resilience.

Successful students' goal-oriented mindsets required them to have hope and goals for the future and use their aspirational capital. Students used the members of their churches, teachers, and others as knowledge resources when they had encountered difficulties. These students had formulated a community and atmosphere of support to create a network within their transitional experiences. Successful students valued their familial and social capital to move ahead. Successful students also resisted inequality and racist remarks, and took appropriate and necessary steps to protect themselves. They

knew how to use their resistant and navigational capital effectively, and in a way that was seen as prosocial and well-adjusted within their network.

The results of this study are in alignment with the literature on resiliency: "children respond to trauma in different ways, and with greater severity and frequency of traumatic events, the capacity to cope usually declines" (Condly, 2006, p. 211). Children are susceptible to the devastating effects of life's stressors because they lack the means to independently fend for themselves (Condly, 2006). In studying resilient children, Garmezy (1991) described three factors that played an essential role in resilience: characteristics such as intelligence and temperament, familial support, and external support received from institutions. Themes 1 (navigate the system-teacher support) and 2 (positive role models) from Case 1 which included the successful students in this study aligned with Garmezy's research on resiliency including the ability to navigate the system and positive role models. Successful students in this study indicated in their interviews that they had developed and maintained a secure support system comprised of family members, teachers, and other adults in the building. Student participants in this study showed resiliency, took responsibility for their actions, and displayed an impressive amount of motivation to earn their high school diploma against considerable odds.

Likewise, Theme 5 (perspective) from Case 1 showed the perspective from successful students as the mindsets, dispositions, consciousness, and decisions taken during stressful situations. Student interviews revealed successful students' non-confrontational mindset and determination to avoid problems with other students and teachers. Whether students were subjected to racially charged experiences from teachers or other students in the building or if they indicated other difficult situations, the

successful students dealt with conflict in ways deemed as more prosocial and beneficial to create social capital within their environment. Students elected to handle challenges through a variety of non-confrontational approaches such as attempting to stay quiet to minimize conflict or turn to trusted adults for assistance with conflict resolution. Successful students exhibited a certain temperament and emotional intelligence that was beneficial in circumventing negative consequences.

Similarly, a lack of resilience from the struggling students with limited-interrupted formal education can be explained as a result of missing familial and institutional supports that students require to be successful. The parents of resilient children have more positive parenting attitudes and are actively involved in their children's lives (Gribble et al., 1993). Themes 2 (family conflict) and Theme 3 (lack of a role model) highlights the potential negative effects a lack of support for struggling students and poor connections in their school experience can have on graduation rates. This critical information from the research shows the importance of initial home-life connections and conditions, which are affected severely by the experiences of families that navigate in migrating to different cultures and countries.

The role of parents in building resilience in children was found in the interviews with the students in this study. This was supported by empirical evidence in the literature that both parental education and commitment to the child's education contributes to resilience (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 2013). Struggling students had guardians and parents who for a variety of reasons were not present or strongly committed to the child’s education, but instead may have been missing from the home or forced to focus their

energies on other critical needs. The interviews also revealed that parents of struggling students did not have time due to working many hours per week to support their children.

The student and teacher interviews and classroom observations indicated external support is a strong factor contributing to the resilience of children that have experienced traumatic events. Positive school experiences may alleviate the effects of families failing to provide a student with a nurturing environment. Students that attend schools that have caring and committed teachers, although coming from ineffective homes, are more likely to be resilient (Rutter, 2013). Student participants in Case 2 who struggled to graduate had difficulties making connections at schools and made poor school related decisions. The connections that students make at school are imperative. Successful students in Case 1 all felt connected to at least one adult in the building and had the capacity to navigate a complex school system. Struggling students in Case 2 lacking social-emotional connections with the school environment, oftentimes, gravitated towards negative school influences. Some struggling students drop out of school but all students in both Case 1 and 2 emphasized the importance of feeling cared for and being part of a community network. Without a feeling of community support, the effects negatively influenced that student's experiences and motivation to be resilient.

The findings of this study remain consistent with much of the literature presented in Chapter II. Newcomer programs should pay particular attention to the adjustment of students with a limited-interrupted formal education in their school environment ensuring that they are appropriately introduced to the structure of the school, provided with English instruction and are familiarized with the culture of the United States (Short & Boyson, 2004, 2012). The central objective of Newcomer programs, in addition to

assisting with the community and network building process, is to assist language learners in acquiring the skills necessary to succeed in mainstream English classes and other subject areas. Student participants from both case studies alluded to the quality of the newcomer program and were appreciative of the teachers that supported them, even when they were struggling.

Schmidt (2002) explained the dominance of the English language and the social construction of Whiteness that "creates an ideological context within which Americans speaking languages other than English, and whose origins lie in continents other than Europe, are racialized as alien outsiders, as Others" (p. 142). McKinley and Brayboy (2005) stated, "LatCrit theory emphasizes the issues that affect Latina/o people … including immigration, language, identity, culture, and skin color" (p. 429). Participants in this study, from both cases, shared that they were subjected to several racist experiences from teachers and other students. However, observations of students' reactions recorded in the field notes demonstrated that problematic experiences varied. Some students remained silent, some sought the help of trusted adults, and others reacted negatively. Various factors come into play including previous experiences of the students and/or the emotional/mental stressors which a student may be undergoing at school and home. Some students indicated in the interviews that they felt like they could not deal with the stressors in their life and chose to talk back to the teacher or leave the classroom, effectively disengaging. Student’s experience of feeling alienated within the school setting is further increased through the volume of negative experiences they have undergone, which in turn, reinforces the notion that these students are not supported and are seen as the “other.”

Most students in both cases were subjected to uncomfortable and painful situations due to their race and immigration status. As some of the student participants are undocumented, their immigration statuses played a factor in their seeking support due to concerns of deportation and penalization. Students in the study often live in the fear of being displaced and or removed from this country and their homes with which they and their families had sought refuge. Several students in this study had reported a fear of seeking assistance from local, state, and government resources because they could expose family members to deportation, unemployment, or incarceration.

The results indicate that participants strongly benefit from adult support, whether at home or those found at school. Successful students in the first case repeatedly mentioned the guidance and support from family members, teachers, counselors, and mental health professionals as having an important role in their maintaining a sense of success and resilience. In the same manner, struggling students in the second case mentioned a lack of support at home as a barrier to their academic success. These students also grappled with additional challenges in attendance, psycho-emotional health, and educational motivation, not to mention racially fueled challenges that they faced when navigating within the school and community. Struggling students lacked guidance, motivation, and mentorship. These student refugees with a limited-interrupted formal education would significantly benefit from additional adult support by training and appointing adult mentors, proving students with peer role models to shadow in their transition to a new school as a way to improve their educational experiences. Affirming and supportive educational environments is crucial to offset the challenges faced outside of the school day.

To accommodate the growing immigrant population, the Board of Estimate and Taxation voted to allocate $1 million to the city's public schools and $400,000 to the Community Services Department to provide educational resources and mental health and social services (Kayata, 2019). The $1 million would fund the opening of additional English Language Learner content classes at the high schools and go toward supporting general education teachers with students who speak minimal English. The Community Services Department would hire two bilingual social workers to work with students and their families'. The Chief Financial Officer stated "There has really been an extraordinary set of circumstances that has confronted the district. There's really a cooperation between the school district and the city in trying to identify what is the most effective way to provide these services" (p. 1). The school board of education unanimously approved the appropriation. The support from the community and the school is necessary and possible to aid in student refugees' success in achieving their educational goals and in helping to provide services for their emotional well-being.

Limitations

The primary limitation was the small convenience sample of 12 Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education in a single school in the northeastern part of the United States. Although the findings from this study could not be generalized to a larger population, many students throughout the country face similar and diversely difficult issues. Researcher bias could also be a limitation to this study but validity measures including data triangulation, member checks and expert audit reduced potential interpretation bias.

Although focusing only on Central American student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education restricted the findings to that group, it allowed the researcher to give this group of students a voice and to meet the aim of identifying the challenges that this population had faced throughout their educational experiences.

Implications of the Study

To increase and support the success of student refugees, school administrators and policymakers can work together to implement better policy and practices for student refugees. A wrap-around compendium of support and awareness is tantamount to the success of all students, and these students are no exception (Eber, Hyde, & Suter, 2011). Service-providers and stakeholders working together can focus on a variety of beneficial outcomes, which include delivering targeted professional development, implementing a mentorship program, and providing mental health services. School personnel should also explore with limited-interrupted education students and their families the possibility of seeking alternative pathways to earning a high school diploma. Following are recommendations to be implemented at the secondary level:

Professional development for teachers and administrators. Teachers, school principals, and other administrators should advocate for student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education. Research has shown that it takes 5 to 7 years for immigrant students to acquire sufficient oral and academic language, yet it takes 7 to 10 years for student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education to reach the same level (DelliCarpini, 2008). Student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school than other English language learners (Walsh, 2003). Thus, programs designed for student refugees should be developed to consider the

histories and challenges of these students and fortify the support, access, and resources to offset inconsistent educational exposure. Although teachers may work hard to provide the best learning environment possible in the newcomer classrooms, school leaders should engage in designing and supporting programs that address the social, emotional, and academic needs of student refugees. Addressing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, trauma, and depression are essential for all students that suffer from these mental barriers. Creating opportunities for social-emotional connections, through clubs, sports, and other extra-curricular activities, could benefit students greatly.

Policy recommendations for the district. The district in this study could implement a mentor program, provide on-going mental health services, and develop a protocol for identifying student refugees that may qualify for special education. There is no monolithic route toward offering support of these students who are as diverse as their non-refugee counterparts, but with the additional challenge of navigating cultural, linguistic, and societal experiences requires additional attention and support.

The school could implement a mentor program used to support struggling students. When designing newcomer programs, the consistent availability of mental health services to students struggling with trauma from the past would be critical to students as they adapt to their new settings. Rather than being isolated and seen as a group hindered by language and cultural barriers, the attempt and resulting implementation of supports lays the groundwork for a successful education experience.

Policy recommendations at the state level. The typical 4-year limitation of most high school programs is not the best fit for student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education. Apart from having to acquire English, these students also have to catch

up on academic content. There is no longer a need for the industrial, one-size-fits-all model of school tailored to serve one small population of students (Hess, 2010). Student refugees should have alternative options to complete their high school diploma. Thus, policymakers and the State Department of Education (2015) should consider the background of student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education when examining alternative graduation options including vocational programs and acquiring skills for independence and success while understanding the new environment they occupy.

Recommendations for Future Research

Longitudinal follow-up of participants could inform their pathways to postsecondary academic or vocational careers and what circumstances contributed to those outcomes. Whether student refugees with limited-interrupted formal education receive their diploma, age out, or drop out, it is essential to know what happens to them once they leave high school. The victories and roadblocks these students encounter after high school can help to illuminate further the types of programs and services public schools need to provide to prepare these students for vocational training or the postsecondary world.

Additional research, such as a complete program evaluation, should also be conducted as it appears that the newly implemented newcomer program shows promising results for refugee students with a limited-interrupted formal education. A newcomer program can be designed to acclimate any English Language learner student arriving in the middle or secondary grades. Studies need to be done to evaluate the effectiveness of English language learner programs, specifically for student refugees with limited-

interrupted formal education. Such studies would illuminate the power of newcomer programs and would highlight best practices to assist with this unique and growing population of students.

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Appendix I: University of Bridgeport Approval of Research

APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

December 14, 2018
Yanetsy Diaz
College of Engineering, Business, and Education
University of Bridgeport

Dear Ms. Diaz:

On December 14, 2018 a designated IRB member approved the following human subject research via expedited review:

Type of Review: *Initial Review*
Project Title: The Effects of an Interrupted Formal Education of Central American Refugee's on Their Experiences in an Urban Secondary School in the United States: An Ethnographic Study
Investigator: Yanetsy Diaz
IRB ID: 2018--12--02
Funding Agency: N/A
Grant Title: N/A
Grant ID: N/A
IND or IDE: N/A

To request continuing approval, you are to submit a completed "UB HRP-212 FORM: Continuing Review Progress Report" and required attachments by November 14, 2019.
For study closure, you are to submit a completed "UB HRP-212 FORM: Continuing Review Progress Report" and required attachments by January 14, 2020.
If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of December 14, 2019, this research expires on that date.
In conducting this research, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual.
Sincerely,
Julie F. Demers
IRB Administrator
CC: Dr. Thomas Christ
[redacted]

Appendix A: Student Interview Protocol

1. Could you tell me when and how you came to the United States?

2. Why did your family leave your country?

3. Have you had an experience with violence in your country?

4. Could you tell me about your schooling experiences before coming to the United States?

5. When did you start to learn English?

6. Tell me about your schooling experiences here in the United States?

7. If you have experienced difficulties in your life that people might describe as stressful, how did you deal with these events?

8. What do you like best about the current program you are enrolled in?

9. What don't you like about the current program you are enrolled in?

10. If you had a say in your school and program, what would you do differently/same?

11. Tell me about your home/family life.

12. How has your family helped you to cope with difficulties in your life?

13. What do you see yourself doing after High School?

15. How do you feel your schooling and family experiences will help prepare you for the future?

16. Would you like to add anything else?

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your teaching experience.

2. What kinds of experiences have you had with adolescent students with limited-interrupted formal education?

3. What are students with limited-interrupted formal education strengths and weaknesses?

4. What works best for the instruction of students with limited-interrupted formal education?

5. Tell me about a challenging time when teaching adolescent students with limited-interrupted formal education.

6. Tell me about a rewarding time when teaching adolescent students with limited-interrupted formal education.

7. Do you communicate with parents of students with limited-interrupted formal education?

8. What kind of support is there from administrators to you (teachers) and students with limited-interrupted formal education?

9. What are some things that you would like to see put in place to support students with limited-interrupted formal education?

10. Would you like to add anything else?

Appendix C: Administrator Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about the program and policies that the district has implemented to support students with limited-interrupted formal education.

2. What are the challenges?

3. What else should be done to support struggling students?

4. What are you proud of?

Appendix D: Observation Protocol

Date of observation:

Time of observation:

Teacher being observed:

1. What are the learning objectives that the students are given?

2. What are the students required to do and know?

3. How are the students required to make sense of the information?

4. How are the students doing with the tasks?

Appendix E: Fieldnotes Protocol

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	REFLECTIONS	EMERGING QUESTIONS/ ANALYSES	FUTURE ACTION

Appendix F: Secondary Source Data Organization Protocol

Student Name			
Attendance Tardies/Absences			
Grade Point Average			
Disciplinary Actions: Referrals Detentions			
LAS Links Scores			
Credits Accumulated			
Grades/Course Failures			

Appendix G: Student and Parent Consent Form

Title of Research Study

The Effects of an Interrupted Formal Education of Central American Refugees' on Their Experiences in an Urban Secondary School in the United States Ethnographic Study

Investigator: Yanetsy Diaz

What you should know about a research study

Someone will explain this research study to you.

You volunteer to be in a research study.

Whether or not you take part is up to you.

You can choose not to take part in the research study.

You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.

Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.

Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at ydiaz@my.bridgeport.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to the IRB Administrator at (203) 576-4974 or irb@bridgeport.edu about any of the following:

Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why are you doing this research?

This research is being conducted to gain insight into the academic experiences of students that have had a limited or interrupted formal education in one public school. The study will give voice to the participants about their experiences as student refugees that have had an interruption to their education. It has the potential to gain understanding of the experiences of students in one school district. Findings from this research have the potential to be useful for district leaders, policy makers, and the school personnel that are involved in daily interactions with this student group.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 30 minutes to one hour and will take place in one day.

How many people will be studied?

We expect about 20 people will be in this research study. We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 1 hour.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

If you agree to be in this research study, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire with questions regarding both your personal demographic information. You will then be asked to provide information about your academic experiences during a recorded interview. Once you have completed the interview, you will be asked if you are able to provide the name(s) and contact information of additional individuals who you believe may be interested in participating in this study. Your

participation in this study can be terminated without your consent if found that you do not meet the participation criteria.

What happens if I say no, I do not want to be in this research?

You may decide not to take part in the research, and it will not be held against you.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You agree to take part in the research now. You may stop at any time and it will not be held against you.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

Participating will not hurt you. Your identity will remain confidential.

Will being in this study help me anyway?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from taking part in this research.

What happens to the information you collect?

Your personal information will not be included in any part of the reported research findings made public. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB. We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?

The person in charge of the research study or the sponsor can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include failure to follow the instructions of the researcher. The sponsor can also end the research study early.

Signature Block for Capable Adult: Long Form

Your signature below documents your permission to take part in this research and to the use and disclosure of your protected health information: ***[Remove latter section if there is no HIPAA authorization]***

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS DATE → _____

_____	_____
Signature of subject	Date
_____	
Printed name of subject	
_____	_____
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
_____	_____
Printed name of person obtaining consent	Form Date

[Add the following block if you will obtain a witness to the signature (required for all Veterans Administration (VA) research)]

_____	_____
Signature of witness to signature	Date
_____	
Printed name of person witnessing signature	

[Add the following block if a witness will observe the consent process (required for the short form of consent documentation)]

My signature below documents that the information in the consent document and any other written information was accurately explained to, and apparently understood by, the subject, and that consent was freely given by the subject.

_____	_____
Signature of witness to consent process	Date
_____	
Printed name of person witnessing consent process	

Signature Block for Adult Unable to Consent

Your signature below documents your permission for the subject named below to take part in this research and to the use and disclosure of this person's protected health information: ***[Remove latter section if there is no HIPAA authorization]***

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS DATE → _____

_____ _____

Signature of subject Date

_____

Printed name of subject

_____ _____

Signature of person obtaining consent Date

_____ _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent Form Date

[Add the following block if you will document assent of the subject

Assent

- ❑ Obtained
- ❑ Not obtained because the capability of the subject is so limited that the subject cannot reasonably be consulted.

[Add the following block if you will obtain a witness to the signature (required for all Veterans Administration (VA) research)]

_____ _____

Signature of witness to signature Date

_____

Printed name of person witnessing signature

[Add the following block if a witness will observe the consent process (required for the short form of consent documentation)]

My signature below documents that the information in the consent document and any other written information was accurately explained to, and apparently understood by, the subject, and that consent was freely given by the subject.

_____ _____

Signature of witness to consent process Date

_____

Printed name of person witnessing consent process

Signature Block for Children

Your signature below documents your permission for the child named below to take part in this research and to the use and disclosure of this child's protected health information: ***[Remove latter section if there is no HIPAA authorization]***

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS DATE →

Printed name of child

Signature of parent or guardian | Date

Printed name of parent or guardian

- ❑ Parent
- ❑ Guardian (See note below)

Note on permission by guardians: An individual may provide permission for a child only if that individual can provide a written document indicating that he or she is legally authorized to consent to the child's general medical care. Attach the documentation to the signed document.

[Add the following block if you will obtain permission of the second parent unless that parent is deceased, unknown, incompetent, or not reasonably available, or only one parent has legal responsibility for the care and custody of the child]

Signature of parent | Date

Printed name of parent

If signature of second parent not obtained, indicate why: (select one)

- ❑ Second parent is deceased
- ❑ Second parent is unknown
- ❑ Second parent is incompetent
- ❑ Second parent is not reasonably available
- ❑ Only one parent has legal responsibility for the care and custody of the child

[Add the following block if you will document assent of children]

Assent

- ❑ Obtained
- ❑ Not obtained because the capability of the child is so limited that the child cannot reasonably be consulted.

[Add the following block to all consents]

Signature of person obtaining consent and assent | Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent	Form Date

[Add the following block if you will obtain a witness to the signature (required for all Veterans Administration (VA) research)]

Signature of witness to signature	Date
Printed name of person witnessing signature	

[Add the following block if a witness will observe the consent process (required for the short form of consent documentation)]

My signature below documents that the information in the consent document and any other written information was accurately explained to, and apparently understood by, the subject, and that consent was freely given by the subject.

Signature of witness to consent process	Date
Printed name of person witnessing consent process	

Appendix H: Teacher and Administrator Consent Form

Title of research study:

The Effects of An Interrupted Formal Education of Central American Refugees' on Their Experiences in an Urban Secondary School in the United States Ethnographic Study

Investigator: Yanetsy Diaz

What you should know about a research study

Someone will explain this research study to you.

You volunteer to be in a research study.

Whether or not you take part is up to you.

You can choose not to take part in the research study.

You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.

Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.

Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at ydiaz@my.bridgeport.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to the IRB Administrator at (203) 576-4974 or irb@bridgeport.edu about any of the following:

Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why are you doing this research?

This research is being conducted to gain insight into the academic experiences of students that have had a limited or interrupted formal education in one public school. The study will give voice to the participants about their experiences as student refugees that have had an interruption to their education. Anticipated findings have the potential to be useful for district leaders, policy makers, and the school personnel that are involved in daily interactions with this student group. Your participation will add valuable knowledge towards documenting the academic experiences of this population of students.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 30 minutes to one hour and will take place in one day.

How many people will be studied?

We expect about 20 people will be in this research study. We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 1 hour.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

If you agree to be in this research study, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire with questions regarding your personal demographic information. You will then be asked to provide information regarding your professional experience with students that have had interrupted formal education during a recorded interview. Once you have completed the interview, you will be asked if you are able to provide the name(s) and contact information of additional individuals who you believe

may be interested in participating in this study. Your participation in this study can be terminated without your consent if found that you do not meet the participation criteria.

What happens if I say no, I do not want to be in this research?

You may decide not to take part in the research, and it will not be held against you.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You agree to take part in the research now. You may stop at any time and it will not be held against you.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

Participating will not hurt you. Your identity will remain confidential.

Will being in this study help me anyway?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from taking part in this research.

What happens to the information you collect?

Your personal information will not be included in any part of the reported research findings made public. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB. We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?

The person in charge of the research study or the sponsor can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include failure to follow the instructions of the researcher. The sponsor can also end the research study early.

Signature Block for Capable Adult: Long Form

Your signature below documents your permission to take part in this research and to the use and disclosure of your protected health information:

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS DATE →

Signature of subject	Date
Printed name of subject	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	Form Date

[Add the following block if you will obtain a witness to the signature (required for all Veterans Administration (VA) research)]

Signature of witness to signature	Date
Printed name of person witnessing signature	

[Add the following block if a witness will observe the consent process (required for the short form of consent documentation)]

My signature below documents that the information in the consent document and any other written information was accurately explained to, and apparently understood by, the subject, and that consent was freely given by the subject.

Signature of witness to consent process	Date
Printed name of person witnessing consent process	

Signature Block for Adult Unable to Consent

Your signature below documents your permission for the subject named below to take part in this research and to the use and disclosure of this person's protected health information:

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS DATE → [ ]

Signature of subject	Date
Printed name of subject	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	Form Date [ ]

[Add the following block if you will document assent of the subject

Assent

- ❑ Obtained
- ❑ Not obtained because the capability of the subject is so limited that the subject cannot reasonably be consulted.

[Add the following block if you will obtain a witness to the signature (required for all Veterans Administration (VA) research)]

Signature of witness to signature	Date
Printed name of person witnessing signature	

[Add the following block if a witness will observe the consent process (required for the short form of consent documentation)]

My signature below documents that the information in the consent document and any other written information was accurately explained to, and apparently understood by, the subject, and that consent was freely given by the subject.

Signature of witness to consent process	Date
Printed name of person witnessing consent process	

Appendix J: Methodological Map